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Gordo



Sir Clement led Hazel up the steep high stairs looking so innocent of tragedy.

THE AVENGER

BY

SAMUEL GORDON

Author of "The Ferry of Fate," "Lesser Destinies," "God's Remnants"

FRONTISPIECE BY

G. W. GAGE

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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PART I
THE BOOK OF HAZEL



THE AVENGER

CHAPTER I

THE CURSE OF THE KAROO

ALL day long the hot anger of heaven had poured down on the desolate land. The white, blinding glare had killed sight and sound and motion. Somewhere, no doubt, created things still had their being and life ran its appointed course. Not here. Here was only a great nothing, a fierce emptiness, a tortured silence. Moloch, the fire-god, was king and made of his kingdom a cemetery of flame.

But, oh, at last a faint quiver of air, wafted from the lips of the pitying night, and the karoo, having lain in asthmatic torpor all through the burning hours, began to lift a dizzied head. Was it true? Another throb of air, and another, and the first full breath of the blessed vesper breeze struck its naked bosom. It moved a tentative limb, it rubbed dazed eyes as it watched the coming of the short rapid twilight. It saw a lone star glimmer out, and knew it for the harbinger of a multitudinous host. And then the wide brown stretches stirred and became articulate with a myriad chorus of ground creatures struggling back to life.

Some juniper bushes swayed with a sort of stupid oscillation, as though trying to shake off the last traces of the narcotic spell that had held them in thrall. The stunted eucalyptus trees shot out shadows that lengthened grotesquely, giving an almost comic touch to the melancholy solemnity of the landscape.

But a spirit, not so much of peace, as of apathy and resignation, still hung over the sullen veldt. A few hours of respite, and then the same terrifying ordeal on the morrow. It seemed to have got beyond the stage of pitying itself for its vast aching loneliness. It had long ago yielded itself up to its fate of being forgotten of God and but rarely remembered of men.

Well, there was at least one man who remembered it, would remember it for a very long day to come. He answered to the name of Derek Skene. It wasn't his name, but of that more anon. He strode across the awakening karoo with a loose, swinging gait, leaning pretty heavily on his knobkerry, for he had come rather a long way. A thick sombrero had rendered him immune from sunstroke. He was completing the last lap of his fifteen-mile tramp home from Sandra Mukerjee's store. His horse had fallen lame when he had reached Mukerjee's place that morning and, after what had passed between him and that amiable gentleman during the ensuing interview, he could not very well ask him for the loan of a mount. Therefore he tramped.

He was a man built for tramping, for battling with distance and fatigue. So much one could gather from the splendid virility of his frame, his harmonious sturdiness of limb, the columned neck, the flowing sweep of the great torso. He walked, one hand open, slightly curved forward as though about to grip an adversary for a throw; the other clenched massively on the head of his stick, as if with a veritable stranglehold on the purpose he had set himself. He appeared a man slow to be moved and yet one who, once set going, was a formidable opponent indeed when, as now, he was out for a reckoning. So much was clear from his eyes, deep-set and cold as steel, and the jaws that looked like nothing so much as a square trap.

He would settle with Dallas. His intention held good, all the more because there was no passion behind it, no vibrant indignation, only a quick, honest anger. He felt no vindictiveness; it was not a case for revenge but of paying back in full measure and with interest. And the beam of the balance should tip the right way. It should go hard with Dallas if he offered any argument.

The loghouse of the farm hove in sight. Skene's glance fell on the stoop, and he blinked rapidly as he remembered that only last night, as on so many nights before, he had sat there, smoking and exchanging congenial talk and no less congenial silences with this so-called friend who had not scrupled to stab him in the back.

He slowed his pace as he walked up the steps and with great deliberation unhasped the door. Dallas, standing by the table, was cleaning an old Winchester, whistling shrilly. He was a tall, well-made fellow, not unhandsome, with some traces of refinement still showing in his dissipated face.

"Hullo, Derek; you look pumped," he said casually.

Skene made no reply, but walked to the mantel-shelf and poured himself out a stiff dose of brandy, swallowing it at a gulp.

"Better?" asked Dallas with a laugh.

"Better or worse, according to the point of view," said Skene with an edge on his words. "Will, I've just come from Mukerjee."

"Old Muck?" Dallas gave a start, but continued easily enough. "How is the oleaginous greaser?"

"Not quite as happy as he was before he saw me. Will, Mukerjee is a scoundrel."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised."

"And you're a bigger."

Again Dallas started, but carried it off with a jaunty laugh.

"That may also be, Derek. But I don't see how the one follows from the other."

"I'll show you the connection."

Skene walked close up to Dallas and looked him straight between the eyes. Dallas quailed for a moment, then forced himself to sustain the other's gaze.

"Look here, Will. When I knocked up against you at Bloemfontein two years ago, you were down and out. I picked you positively out of the gutter. I brought you here, mended you, gave you a share in my business."

"Agreed," said Dallas, flushing. "What's the point of raking that up now?"

"To remind you that you owe me something. A great deal, in fact. Auld lang syne counts after all—there were the old Harrow days. I knew you had left the school under a cloud—were advised to quit, to put it no stronger. I was quite aware that there was a warp in you. But I resolved to risk it. I think you've done very well out of the farm."

"No complaints at all, old boy," said Dallas, with an airy wave of his hand.

"Not on your side, certainly. But, of course, you know what all this is leading up to."

"Not in the least."

"Then you're a liar as well as a thief."

"Oh, damn it, Derek, manners, please, manners!" said Dallas seemingly in mild reproach, but his hand was clenched behind his back.

"I'm talking to you as politely as I know how. You'll concede, Dallas, that I'm keeping my temper remarkably well. What did you do with Mukerjee about those thousand bags of mealies?"

"Mukerjee—mealies? Note the alliteration. I've never had any dealings with the brown skunk. I left that to you."

"You left me the straight deals, for which you had no

capacity. If there was a crooked side-show to be done, you did it—behind my back." Skene noted the bland nonchalance of the other's face and still his self-control held good. "Seems you won't own up even now that I'm rubbing your nose in the mud. You must have the whole rotten story. Very well, you'll have it. You knew of my Government contract for those mealies. The Government contracts are my own reservation—I couldn't trust you to have anything to do with them. I bought the stuff from Mukerjee at his own price. I waited for him to deliver. I sent him message after message and got nothing but evasive answers. To-day I went over to see for myself. It required strong persuasion to make the old scoundrel talk. But he talked at last."

"And you believed the nigger? Oh, blessed innocence!"

"No, I didn't believe him, but I believed my eyes. He showed me your agreement with him. A forgery, eh? What, no?" Dallas had turned white. "Mukerjee has never let me down before. By what devilish devices and for what damnable purpose you got him to play me this trick, heaven knows. Probably to get me into trouble with Pretoria, get me mulcted in a heavy penalty, make me bankrupt and then buy up the farm for a song. You know it's a good paying concern—small thanks to you."

"Oh, yes, alone you did it. Go on, blow your own trumpet," sneered Dallas. His confidence was coming back to him. Skene's bark was always worse than his bite.

"What had happened," Skene went on, almost pensively, "was that you had got Muck to sell you those mealies at a ha'penny per pound over the price I was going to pay him. Strangely enough, when I came to him this morning I found the bags loaded up. But they weren't going to Capetown. They were going to Malcolmson's at Wynstaadt, for whom you had acted as factor. Dallas, I have suspected you be-

fore. There was that business of Bjowering's oxen and those hundred hogsheads of leaf tobacco. But this time I'm certain. With Mukerjee I shall settle in court. With you I'll settle now."

"Meaning, more exactly?"

"That you'll quit here this instant. Harrow, like history, repeats itself. But you'll get the boot wherever you'll go. I'll collect your belongings and send them after you to the depot."

He went to the door and threw it open. Dallas saw that things were looking serious.

"Oh, that's very noble of you," he said, with a reflective air. "But you forget you're putting me to considerable inconvenience. For one thing, there are no workhouses in this benighted land."

Skene made a gesture of contempt.

"Don't go playing on that string," he said coldly. "You've feathered your nest nicely, I'll be bound. And if you've gambled it all away, find work. These last two years you've thriven finely on the marrow of the ox and must have a superabundance of energy to get rid of. You've nothing more to expect from me."

Dallas stood rubbing his chin.

"You're breaking the agreement," he said presently.

"Be glad I don't break your neck."

After that it all went very quickly. With a flash-like turn Skene jerked up the revolver just as Dallas was in the act of pulling the trigger, and the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the rafters. And the next moment he had one of his hands on Dallas' throat while with the other he tried to wrench the weapon from his grip. But he had underestimated the other's strength. He could easily have strangled Dallas, but he carefully refrained from doing so. And given that grace, Dallas showed plenty of staying power.

Up and down the room swayed the fierce struggle. Skene, tired out by the day's long march, began to feel uncertain of himself. He had got Dallas with his back to the roughly timbered table, and was bending him backwards, inch by inch, when Dallas, by a tricky use of his knee, suddenly recovered himself and was about to slip away. But, quick as lightning, Skene brought round his left and fetched him a tremendous whack on the jaw. Down went Dallas like a stricken bull and in going down caught the side of his head against the jagged edge of the table. The revolver clattered from his hand, a rattling gasp came from his throat, he gave a slight wriggle and then lay terribly still.

Skene stepped back and stood looking down on him. On Dallas' right temple showed a red smear where the blood trickled down in great drops over his cheek down upon the neck. Skene continued to look, with a sort of dazed expectancy, as if waiting for his antagonist to rise and go on with the fight.

But Dallas did not rise. And then, cautiously, for he did not know but that it might be a ruse, Skene edged up to him. But Dallas did not move. Skene stooped down and lifted his head. And in the murky light of the oil-lamp swinging from the ceiling he saw a dreadful sight. Dallas' eyes were wide open, but rolled up till nothing but the whites could be seen. His mouth was twisted awry, set in an ironic grin.

And all the time that stark, ominous stillness. With trembling fingers Skene tore open the shirt and listened at the heart. There could be no doubt of it—the machinery of life had stopped. But even then he would not be convinced. Lumbering to his feet, he went and got a tumbler of brandy. The clenched teeth refused admission, and the liquor, running out of the corner of the mouth, distilled itself into the shaggy breast.

Skene stood up and looked round him with a vacuous smile. Dallas was grinning, taking the whole thing as a joke, so why not he? Then a black rage seized him and he kicked the inert heap furiously with his foot.

"Wake up, Will!" he shouted. "None of your damned pranks! You're not dead. Don't sham!"

But Dallas did not respond to the call. He was not shamming, evidently. He had done with deceptions. He had become honest at last.

The cabin was full of shadows. They darted after each other with a soft swishing noise. Everything was astir with a spectral life. Only that thing on the floor was dead, dead with an irritating deadness. And it had died so quickly, giving nobody a chance to hale it back from the black beyond. It had scurried off like a rabbit, burst like a bubble. There was no recalling it. Skene looked at his hands—he did not recognize them. They had changed in shape, in color. With a gesture of horror he flung them from his sight. They had done an unspeakable thing. They had made him a murderer.

From the black compound a mile away came the hushed sounds of the tom-toms with a suggestion of weird incantations and unholy rites, a witches' Sabbath, such as the native mind delights in amid the intimacy of its home. Skene thought dully of contingencies. From the black quarter he was safe. None of the niggers would dare to intrude on the farm after nightfall. One of the Kaffirs had once blundered into it and had gone away, charged with a leaden message for a warning to the rest of his tribe.

But on the morning Charley, Dallas' brother, was due to arrive. He would certainly ask for explanations. It would be difficult to convince him.

There would be no evidence to give a correct interpretation of the happening. There was nothing to show that it

was not a deliberate assault by the slayer on his victim. The revolver, the bullet in the rafters, would prove nothing. It was known that Skene and Dallas possessed weapons of the same pattern, Smith-Wessons, both bought on an expedition to Bulewayo. The motive? A business dispute, a quarrel about the sharing of the profits. Perhaps a woman. And the result? No, the land was not so devoid of the amenities of civilization. It might have no poorhouses, as Dallas had observed, but it had courts of justice. Skene looked up. The pendulating oil-lamp had disappeared from the ceiling and in its place swung a halter. From the tumultuous whirl of his brain one thought stood out clearly, provocatively: he must make his escape.

There was nothing to hinder him. He had the night before him, sufficient to give him a long start against any pursuit. On the road he would have ample time to think out his plans. He had once more become master of himself. All that that evening meant for him, he would, for the moment, relegate to some water-tight compartment of his brain, to be dealt with at his leisure. The grim wrestlings with his conscience would have their due time and place. For the present all his energies of body and soul must be concentrated on saving himself from a dreadful and undeserved fate.

He grew preternaturally deliberate and calm. He knew he would have to spend many hours on the karoo. For that he needed provender. The larder was well filled. He crammed a large wallet with as much as it would hold. Then suddenly came a terrifying thought: he had no money. He had banked a large sum that day in town before seeing Mukerjee. All he had was just a handful of silver. Dallas probably had some on him. He gazed at the huddled form looking white and unearthly in the light of the rising moon, and shuddered. No, not if Dallas had millions. He had

heard of human hyenas rifling the dead on a battlefield—it would be on a par. So much honor was due to Dallas, to be left undisturbed in the dignity of death to which he had unexpectedly attained.

He turned to go. He felt the wrench it cost him to leave this little domain of which he had made himself ruler by years of hard and honest toil. He was going out of it, a beggar and an outcast. He wondered vaguely whether he would ever find the energy, the will, to start again. He saw himself roaming the world, a vagrant, nosing garbage in the gutter—the fate from which he had rescued Dallas. And at that the bitter irony of it all struck him. Not so long ago he had told Dallas to quit, and now he was quitting himself, leaving Dallas in full possession.

He cast a comprehensive glance round the room and then walked out. But on the threshold he came to an abrupt standstill and his heart began to thump violently. A sullen, processional sound came across the distance, a dull thudding as of reluctant hoofs. Perhaps this was King Death, coming, in all his panoply, to look upon his latest acquisition. Ah, yes, those were horses, or rather, bullocks. And then he heard clearly the creaking of a cart and the hoarse angry cries of a man shouting to his team. And then there was the rumbling of recalcitrant wheels.

Skene trembled. Was it Dallas' brother, Charley, anticipating himself by a day? He fled to the clump of stupid juniper bushes and lurked. After long minutes the cart came in sight and he saw, to his relief, that it was not Charley Dallas, but Tom Smee, the mail-carrier on his weekly round. Quickly he strode out into the open to meet him.

"Your paper, Mr. Skene," said Smee, tossing him a small bundle. And then, flinging out the cruel thong over his sweating team, he drove on.

No doubt it was a source of immense pride to the editor of the *Huntingshire Advertiser* that his parochial rag had subscribers on the furthest confines of the empire. Skene had had it sent to him ever since he had cut himself adrift from his native moorings.

How small and petty it now seemed, his quarrel with his father, dwarfed by the doings of the larger years. And all about Flossie, poor, pretty, insignificant Flossie, the simpering little chit, whose ambitions vaulted no higher than a supply of unlimited toffee. Flossie had been sent to service in London and he himself, in a boyish huff, had flung out into the unknown.

He harked back to it all as he sat on the karoo within his ringwall of brushwood fire. Then a column-heading in the paper caught his gaze and he gulped.

"Death of Sir Jacques Barradine."

So he was dead, the old man. He had loved him dearly. Many the happy day he had spent in riot on his great estate, the Priory. Skene read on.

"The heir to the baronetcy and estates would be, if alive, Mr. Clement Barradine, Sir Jacques' eldest nephew, who, it will be remembered, disappeared from Woodlands unaccountably some seventeen years ago and has never been heard of since. The title thus descends, by special remainder, to Mr. Jocelyn Webster, son of Sir Jacques' sister, whose lawyers have lodged a motion in court to presume his cousin's death."

Skene—alias Sir Clement Barradine—sprang to his feet. Heavens, was he to thrust aside the helping hand Providence held out to him? Was he to let them presume his death? Here was an easy way out of all his difficulties. He had simply to cease being Derek Skene and resume his true identity.

He had killed a man. All life had always been sacrosanct

to him. It was a creed he had carried with him triumphantly through the rough places and turbulent times in which his adventurous years had been cast. And now he was a renegade. All that great parade of self-righteousness had gone by the board. His hands were red.

Oh, if only he had not killed Dallas! That was a cry which would come back to him day and night, never to be silenced. He would hear it in the rustling of summer leaves, in the roar of equinoctial gales. He had fashioned for himself an incubus—oh, a merry sprite, laughing gayly at the antics of a tortured heart. It would take many shapes, that of a dog yapping at shrinking heels, of an eagle pecking at open vitals on a Promethean rock, but mostly of the hag that rode the sick conscience of men.

Well, so be it. A great position was waiting for him, a greater ordeal, the one dependent on the other. But whatever the future held for him, he would bear it with dignity. One could put a prestige into suffering that made it equal to the serenest joy. And one day, perhaps, it would shrive him.

The dawn had come. Squaring his shoulders, he struck out on his long and perilous odyssey for the coast.

And his incubus went with him.

CHAPTER II

A HOMECOMING

FIVE months later, towards eventide, he was walking through yeoman meadows, drinking in the nectar of an English spring. He trod reverently, as though on holy ground. Every footstep was a caress of the soil. The autochthonous instinct had seized him mightily. He was on his own green earth again—at last. He felt that he had grown out of it, as, in fabled times, iron men had sprung from a sowing of dragon-teeth.

He stood on the outskirts of the estate, looking round him, his arms half stretched out, as though gathering in the scene in an all-encompassing embrace. Not from any sense of greed nor with any pride of possession, but just for love of this dear land of his, the love of a son for a mother. He felt a hot moisture spring to his eyes, and the large tears coursed slowly down his cheeks.

So the girl saw him. She might have been Diana, or a wood-nymph, straying out of the pages of the same old mythology that contained the dragon-teeth. She walked swiftly, with athletic step, holding her head high, as though she feared no stranger on the loneliest of roads. Her clear gray gaze brushed his face and she made a half-movement of astonishment at sight of this vagrant who wept. She almost seemed inclined to stop and then, on second thoughts, passed swiftly on.

He had seen her too, fleetingly, a shifting apparition glimpsed through the prismatic mist in his eyes. But the

impression, though blurred somewhat by wonder, seemed to have taken a clear and steady hold. It was as if that instantaneous flash had photographed her on to his brain. She had a proud carriage and haughty eyes, as one who wished to keep the world aloof. Would he see her again?

A little brook was running at his feet. He sluiced his face, looked for a handkerchief and, finding none, unceremoniously dried himself with his sleeve and the edge of his coat. Diana had long vanished, but the haughty eyes seemed staring back at him. He gave himself an angry shake. This was no time for day-dreamings. Silly, though, to have been seen crying by a girl. He drew a deep breath and stepped across the frontiers of his heritage.

Presently he was confronted by a board giving warning to trespassers. The words were as music in his ears. They were typical of this good old country, still wrapped in feudal slumber, but glorying in its well-ordered laws and all the seemlinesses of a self-respecting, if somewhat slavish, people. He looked at the board again and again and passed on with a laugh, almost the first laugh he had uttered since that night on the karoo. Then he went on, passing into the forbidden ground. So may a man transgress his own ordinances.

But not unchallenged. From some distance away there reached him a loud view halloo. It came from a man, white-haired but upright and sturdy, and in his veins there rolled apparently the green and sapful old age of which the Latin poet sings. He walked with authority and carried a gun.

"Hi, there, can't you read? That there board says you're trespassin'."

The alleged intruder gave the oncomer a keen look and a quizzical smile curled round his lips.

"Am I, indeed? I believe not."

"You don't? Then you must have 'scaped from the 'sylum. You don't belong to the estate. I suppose I ought to know by now who do and who don't."

"Pardon me, I don't think you do, old chap."

The man with the gun lost his speech. He came close to this insolent tramp, dressed in an odd assortment of sailor's clothes and mufti, who stood his ground with such quiet confidence.

"We're all liable to make mistakes," continued the trespasser reassuringly.

The gamekeeper became furious.

"A strange poacher!" he roared. "As if we ain't got enough of our own. Now then, no more o' your lip. Comin' for your traps in broad daylight—imperence! Goin' off quietly?"

"No."

"Then you're arrested," said the man with the gun and took a firm grip of the other's shoulder.

"Surely you wouldn't lock me up, Waggles, would you?"

The gamekeeper's hand dropped as if he had touched an electric eel. Instead he brought it to his chin, from which depended a thin straggling growth of hair in a longish tuft that wagged in the wind and had evidently earned for him the sobriquet by which the other had addressed him.

"Waggles!" he echoed under his breath, with a half-dazed air. "There's only one person on this earth as used to call me by that name, and he's gone these many years."

"Well, have a good look, you dear old goat."

Waggles stepped closer still and peered hard under the mask of thick black beard that framed the other's face. Then his rubicund features changed color and he tottered back.

"God in heaven!" he exclaimed. "If it ain't Master Clem!"

"Bull's eye, Waggles," said the other, holding out his hand.

If Waggles had been a foreigner, he would no doubt have caught it rapturously to his lips and gone down on his knees. But he was an Englishman, to whom a handshake is a warm enough welcome to anybody. The tears, however, stood in his eyes and he was unashamed.

"Oh, that I should have lived to see you again, Master . . ." He pulled himself up short and a flash of understanding lit up his face. Drawing himself erect to his full height, which was considerable, he stood stiffly as a soldier on parade. "Sir Clement Barradine, I should say." A fierce pride rang from his words. "And I bet I'm the first man what's called you that, Sir Clement. Nobody can take it away from me."

"I wouldn't let 'em," said Sir Clement soothingly, as he affectionately linked arms with the old man. Then he stood scratching his head with an air of perplexity. "Now, Waggles, what do I do next?"

"Do first, Sir Clement," Waggles corrected him. "You takes possession, Sir Clement. It's all yours," and he swung his arm round in a comprehensive gesture.

"I suppose so," said Sir Clement rather meditatively.

"Strange your turning up just now, Sir Clement. You've come in the nick o' time. That lawyer gentleman has come down for the day to see Mr. Jocelyn, Sir Clement. I've heard say as the courts is goin' to give their decision next week, Sir Clement."

He rolled out the title with great gusto, catching at every occasion of using it. It sounded strange in his listener's ears. Once or twice he looked round to see if it was somebody else who was being addressed.

"Is that so, Waggles?" he said slowly. "You see, I don't

know what's happened. I just came on the off-chance."

"It's Mr. Jocelyn who gets the off-chance, I think," said Waggles, rubbing his hands with a grim glee. "My word, but won't his handsome nose be out of joint! I'm very, very sorry."

"Judging from your tone, my cousin doesn't seem very popular. What sort of a chap is he?"

"No better than he ought to be, Sir Clement. I don't think I'm the only one who will be as well content that you are the new master of the Priory, and not Mr. Jocelyn, Sir Clement."

"Ah, Waggles"—Sir Clement spoke gravely—"you know what I was. You don't know what I may be now."

"I'll take a risk on that, Sir Clement. The leopard don't change his spots and the lion don't take on any."

"I'm afraid I'm only an ass in a lion's skin," said Sir Clement a little ruefully. Then he drew himself up resolutely. "Well, I'd better get this little job over."

"And a kind action to Mr. Jocelyn to put him out of his suspense, Sir Clement," said Waggles slyly. "He'll be so pleased to hear you aren't dead, Sir Clement."

They strode on through the preserves, coming at last to the moat, spanned by a drawbridge, that made Woodlands Priory one of the most perfect survivals of historic medievalism. The first authentic Barradine had been the Grand Prior of the Dominicans and had held his court here at the time of the dissolution of the order in England. Upon that the Priory had been granted in fief to his nephew, who at the same time attained to secular honors. With the lapse of the years the fief tenure had fallen into abeyance, and the rich demesne had become the uncontested property of the holder of the title. The fine old chapel, with its priceless stained windows, had been struck by lightning at the be-

ginning of the eighteenth century and destroyed, save for the north wing which had remained intact and gave silent testimony of its ancient splendor.

But the rest of the Priory towered aloft in its old-time magnificence, and the new owner felt a catch at his heart as, after his long exile, he gazed once more on the venerable pile. Memories crowded upon him thick and fast, but he thrust them aside. The present was sufficiently big with momentousness. He could hardly realize that he had attained it.

He could not help harking back to the terrible journey across the uncharted spaces he had traversed. Many a time he had despaired of reaching his goal. Hunger, thirst and danger had been his constant companions every step of the road. More than once he had thrown himself to earth and prayed God to put an end to his sufferings. And always, by some miraculous chance, help had come, or his own resolution had heartened him to prevail. And, oh, that blessed moment, when at last the shimmering expanse of the sea had burst upon his sight and he had been tempted to exclaim, like the returning Greek host: "Thalassa—thalassa!"

And then the nightmare of the ship's journey, in the foul stoke-hole, with the sickening smell of an unspeakable cargo drifting through every cranny, permeating every pore of his flesh. He could hardly believe that he still had a living body when he stepped ashore and felt the good English earth under his feet once more.

He was almost sorry that he could still feel glad. He would have wished his purgatory to endure. In the physical stress he had forgotten the inward rack. Muscle and sinew might ache, but they gave relief to the fibers of his soul. Soul—he was beginning to hate the word. It stood for the nobler part of the human microcosm, but he had not kept it so. He had made it an ash-pit of fear and con-

fusion, penance and comminatory pangs. There was no Tophet, save for those who fashioned it for themselves.

Prayer was not in him, so he could hope for no conciliation with himself by a divine appeal. His beliefs held no dogma; they were a philosophy. Well, philosophy would serve. Of such was made the stoic's armor. Mastery of mind and force of will were its breast-plate and greaves. They would not shield him from inward assault, but the first thing was to guard from without.

He was about to stand forth before the world in a great rôle. His eyes must encounter it steadily, as though at the back of them there were no vision of dark places where he had forfeited his salvation. He must put the grim past behind him as far as it would allow itself to be put. He had literally put thousands of miles between Sir Clement Barradine and Derek Skene. He knew he would seek Derek Skene again, many a time and oft. But it must be by underground passages to be tunneled through the earth in the silence and privacy of his inner travail.

Waggles did not disturb his reflections. No doubt Sir Clement had a lot to think about, though, good simple man that he was, he would have been considerably astonished had he guessed at the truth. But both were speedily called upon to deal with the realities of life. One of these realities was a bulky man with an austere countenance, who met them in the great archway that formed the entrance to the mansion, and who planted himself solidly in their path, putting out a severely remonstrative arm.

"What's this, Crane? There's a fine thing, bringin' your disreputable friends into the house. This ain't the 'White Hart.'"

Waggles laughed and then instantly grew solemn again.

"Excuse me, Mr. Pew. This isn't none o' your business."

"I know it isn't. The footmen will deal with it."

And he blocked the passage more effectively as he turned to call for assistance. But Waggles did not wait. None too gently he shouldered Mr. Pew aside, as he said:

"Don't interfere, man, and make way for your betters."

Then he marched on, followed without a word by Sir Clement, while Mr. Pew called on heaven and earth to witness the indignity of having a ragged sailor chap classed among his betters. But he took no further action. There was something about that sailor chap. . . . Mr. Pew scratched his head pensively.

"Had one o' my own back there," chuckled Waggles, between whom and the pompous majordomo there obtained a vendetta long and bitter.

On the broad oaken staircase they met one or two of the servants, who stared in perplexity at the dilapidated stranger, making his way, surefootedly and under the respectful ægis of the trusty Mr. Crane, into the inmost penetralia of the great house. Down the long dim corridor passed the two men, Waggles leading the way with the solemn air of an archbishop leading a king to his throne. Outside of what Sir Clement knew to be the study door he paused and knocked.

"Come in," called a shrill and rather disagreeable voice.

A young man, effeminately handsome, with a weak chin and large watery blue eyes, uttered an exclamation and sprang to his feet as they entered. He was evidently the owner of the shrill, disagreeable voice.

"Crane, what's the meaning of this?"

"Well, sir, beggin' your pardon," said Waggles imperturbably, "I was just showin' Sir Clement the way. Sir Clement Barradine, you know."

"The devil!" exclaimed the other occupant of the room, an elderly man, with lawyer writ large all over his face.

"Not quite, I hope," smiled Sir Clement. "How do you

do, Mr. Mason? Some time since I spent a week-end with you here. How are Hugh and Walter?"

"Quite well, thank you," stammered the lawyer. "I—I seem to remember you."

"You've gone daft, Crane," cried the young man hotly. "I'll teach you to play practical jokes. Crane, you're dismissed!"

"Crane has not gone daft and he's not dismissed," said Sir Clement with an air of quiet assurance. "I take it you're my cousin Jocelyn. When I saw you last you were, I think, just beginning to strut it in knickerbockers. Awfully sorry to blow in on you so unceremoniously. Malplaquet, Jocelyn," he went on softly. "Won't you shake hands with me?"

Jocelyn heaved up his shoulders as if something had prodded him.

"Not me," he said, stepping away in a fuming flurry and turning to the lawyer. "Mr. Mason, this is your business. There's an impudent conspiracy here. This fellow has evidently been studying the Tichborne case."

"That he hasn't," said Waggles sturdily. "I'll swear to him and so will hundreds of others."

"One moment, Jocelyn," said the lawyer hastily, turning to the window recess whither Jocelyn followed him frowning.

Sir Clement remained where he was. It was no concern of his what the lawyer said to his cousin. His gaze fixed itself on a portrait of Sir Jacques, life-like and life-size, almost such as he was in the days when he had last known him. He thought the old man smiled at him. It seemed as if any moment he might step down out of the frame to give welcome to the kinsman he had loved. Sir Clement thought that Jocelyn had been right in demanding some more intimate form of identification. Waggles' word, though

supported by that of many others, might not be enough. The Tichborne claimant had found many deluded adherents. Sir Clement had no birth certificate—he had not thought of taking it when he left England. He hadn't even a birth-mark. True, there was his handwriting. He might have copied it from the real heir, now dead. Perhaps he had been in too much of a hurry. He saw himself involved in long legal squabbles, the issue of which was uncertain.

He smiled. He was worrying himself unnecessarily. He knew all the traditions, all the inmost secrets of the house. He looked at the tall ebony secretaire, enclosing the white marble structure that represented the Taj Mahal, cunningly inlaid with lapis lazuli, a rich work of Eastern imagery. A secret drawer of it contained the bullet, gold-mounted, that killed Sir Pomfrey Barradine at Malplaquet. It was the family mascot, known only to members of it. "Malplaquet" was the password between them, and it had evidently struck home to Jocelyn. There was other evidence he could give.

But he saw it was not necessary. The lawyer came hurrying towards him.

"Sir Clement—very sorry. But, you know, you took us rather by surprise," he said warmly. "Let me be the first to congratulate you."

"I was the first," said Waggles bluntly.

"Well, we won't quarrel about it, Crane," laughed Mr. Mason.

"You may go," said Sir Clement kindly to Waggles.

And Waggles went, radiant. He had seen Sir Clement safely enthroned.

"You must make allowance, Sir Clement," said Mr. Mason in a low voice, jerking his head in the direction of Jocelyn.

Sir Clement nodded and moved forward. But Jocelyn hung back, sullen and cold.

"Well, Jocelyn?"

"Do you want me also to congratulate you?" said Jocelyn between a laugh and a snarl. "By all means. I congratulate you on having made a most dramatic entrance. You look like an advertisement for a traveling circus. Or did you think you were coming to a masquerade ball?"

"Oh, these," said Sir Clement, looking down at his clothes with a whimsical smile. "I apologize. Sorry I hurt your susceptibilities. But my screw as stoker on the ship that brought me over was just enough to take me up from Plymouth. It didn't stretch to a new suit. And besides, if I came as I am, it's because I want people to take me as they find me. That's, in a manner of speaking, the key-note of my life." His voice had hardened on the last words, but now grew soft again. "Don't be so bitter, boy. It's all in the luck of the game."

"Yes, and it's all on your side. I was brought up to be master of Woodlands. Nobody ever expected anything else. Mr. Mason, you've turned me down cruelly," Jocelyn went on with a look of despair and fury. "You crumpled up like an empty sack. Surely there must be ways and means of fighting this absurd development."

The lawyer made a distressed and helpless gesture.

"What are you afraid of, Jocelyn?" Sir Clement asked quietly.

"Nothing now. I'm done brown, that's all. Uncle thought I was going to get the lot, so he made me no special provision—Mr. Mason can tell you that. I'm left high and dry."

"You're not, Jocelyn. This place is your home as much as if you owned it. As to your allowance, I can't say anything about that till I know what the estate can afford."

"I wouldn't worry on that score, Sir Clement," said Mr. Mason with a significant smile. "We must talk things over. I am sorry I have to get back to town to-night. But I would suggest your following me to-morrow and then we can go into matters. Also, I presume, you will require an outfit. If you will allow me, perhaps this will be enough to cover your more immediate necessities," and he took a bundle of notes from his pocket-book. "So—to-morrow. The first thing I must do is to stay proceedings in court. Good-by, Sir Clement. Good-by, Jocelyn."

And he made a precipitate departure, as though glad to get away from the somewhat constricted atmosphere of the room.

"Well, Jocelyn," said Sir Clement after a pause, "are you going to stay here?"

Jocelyn made a petulant gesture.

"I don't know. I've got to think it over."

Sir Clement looked pityingly at the boy. If it had not been some subtlety of Providence, intent on her own ends, that had called him to this high place, he had it in his heart even then to quit. But he had lost the power, the privilege of initiative. He had become the slave of destiny.

"I don't know what there is to think over, Jocelyn. I feel my duty to you as to a younger brother." He laid his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder, but Jocelyn, rather ungraciously, turned with the evident intention of leaving the room. "Don't go, boy," Sir Clement went on pleadingly. "Let us be friends. I've had a cold and empty homecoming. There's a sort of heart-hunger in me and I feel very lonely. You and I are the only two left with the Barradine blood running in our veins. I want you to tell me the story of other days, the story of my own people. I've been away such a long time, and I know nothing."

"Well, not now," said Jocelyn, a little less surlily. "I'm

sorry I've got to be off, I've got an engagement. I'm due at the archdeaconry for bridge," but he avoided Sir Clement's look as he uttered the last words.

"Oh, in that case—I don't want to stop your fun," said Sir Clement, smiling at him with a bright kindliness. "I dare say you'll find me up when you get back."

He was left behind in the solitude of his new splendor. For a long time he strode the room, feeling at a loose end. No, that was hardly the correct expression. He would never feel at a loose end. Moving or at rest, he, the slave of destiny, would hear the clank of the drag-chain.

CHAPTER III

THE HAZELNUT COPSE

It was a peculiar bridge party to which Jocelyn went. It is not usual for archdeacons to play bridge, or anything else, in a hazelnut copse, except possibly at a picnic, and there is no reliable record even of that. A wag might here throw in a pun about gamboling on the green. Jocelyn's engagement does not take us to the archdeaconry at all. There we shall go presently.

He walked with a jaunty stride, for by nature he was of gossamer stuff. Even the catastrophic change his fortunes had just undergone did not trouble him greatly. His was the volatile effervescence of youth, frothing over into bubbles of optimism. The cousin who had turned up so unexpectedly, seemed a good-natured, sentimental fool. And it looked to Jocelyn that he could still have the game, even if he didn't have the name.

He sat down on a fallen tree-trunk and lit a cigarette. In the curling smoke he saw pleasant pictures. What an obstinate little baggage she was and how long it had taken him to woo her! How she had evaded him, avoiding his pursuit like a frightened fawn. But it was his usual good fortune to turn fear into love.

He caught a shimmer of white through the trees and a few moments later she was upon him. He rose and took off his hat with that air of humble chivalry which he knew was so becoming to him. It would be unkind to mention that he practiced it before the glass. His eyes encompassed her greedily. Never had he seen her so entrancingly fresh,

never in such radiant daintiness which yet exhaled a certain strength and a splendid vitality. It made him feel how much stronger he was. He caught her to him with gallant tenderness.

"Am I late?" she asked breathlessly.

"You can never be too early for me."

"You dear boy! I've been running. I know how you hate to be kept waiting."

"You kept me waiting long enough," he said reproachfully.

"Wasn't I worth it?" she asked, lifting her gray eyes to his with a shy conceit.

"You're worth all the earth to me. I'll refuse to go to heaven. I hate an anticlimax."

They both laughed, but her eyes were moist. He held her at arm's length.

"Has it ever struck you how you fit into this place? Hazel copse, Hazel eyes, Hazel by name. . . ."

"I hope I shall always fit into your life, dearest," she said softly.

He did not answer. Some complex form of cruelty urged him to keep her in her fool's paradise a little longer.

"Jocelyn, dear," she said after a pause marked by certain demonstrations, "when—when are we going to tell people?"

"How impatient you are, little girl. Can't we keep it to ourselves a little longer? It's such a sweet secret. I'm jealous of letting the world share it."

"Yes, but sometimes it's more than I can bear. I want to cry it aloud from the housetops. Darling"—she lowered her eyes—"I did a wicked thing. I hope you'll forgive me."

"What was it you did?" he asked, frowning.

"I—I told Tabitha."

"What, Miss Witherspoon, that garrulous old cat?"

"She isn't garrulous, and she isn't an old cat," Hazel

replied, drawing herself away indignantly. "But I felt I had to tell somebody or die. And Tabitha will be as secret as the grave. She has been as good as a sister to me. From her I had the first bit of love since—since our home smashed up."

Her lips were quivering and he caught her to him with a great show of penitence.

"Oh, my poor little girl!"

"Never mind—don't let's speak of it," she said brightly, dashing away the gathering tears. "And, Jocelyn, dear, I'll never again worry you about the announcement. Of course you know better than I."

"Yes, unfortunately," he said with pursed lips.

'What is it, dear?" she asked in sudden alarm.

"I'm ousted—dispossessed."

"Dispossessed of what?"

"Title, estate, the whole bag of tricks," he said gloomily. "A chap, cousin of mine, who had the impertinence to be born ahead of me, has turned up and collared the lot."

She was silent for a little while, then she said suddenly:

"So I shall never be Lady Barradine!"

"Not unless something happens to him."

"Oh, how splendid!"

He looked at her, staggered. Then his look turned to a scowl.

"That's a funny thing to say, Hazel!"

"Shall I tell you, Jocelyn? I never wanted to be a grand lady. I simply dreaded it. I'm only a simple little schoolmarm and I have no aspirations."

"But I have," he said sullenly. "Don't you see the difference this makes to me?"

"Oh, I know, I know," she cried quickly. "I can imagine your disappointment and I am, oh! so sorry for you.

But I can't help feeling selfishly glad. Now we're more on a footing and I won't have to reach so high up to you."

"That's very pretty. But it may make a difference in more ways than one. What on earth are we to be married on? I haven't a penny in the world."

"Oh, Jocelyn," she gasped, "you're not going to give me up, are you?"

"Wouldn't that be best? You don't lose much in me."

"No, not much—except everything. Of course, Jocelyn, I'll release you, if you want me to," and her voice trembled with a pitiful bravery. "I don't want to make things harder for you than they are. Oh, I knew the sun would go down. It never shines on me for long."

He could not resist the appeal of that beautiful, pathetic mouth. Her words roused in him something of his better nature. At the moment he almost forgot that all along he had been only toying with her simple trust. He cradled her head on his shoulder.

"You little goose, it hasn't come to that yet. But," and here he became poetical, "the palace of my hopes has crashed down on me in ruins. I've got to start building it up again."

"And will there be a little corner in it for me?" she asked tearfully.

"Oh, a whole suite of rooms!" he laughed.

"I hate him with all my heart!" she exclaimed with sudden vehemence. "What is he like?"

"You'll soon be able to judge for yourself. No doubt you'll see him slouching about in corduroys, hobnobbing with the clodhoppers in the village. They're about his mark."

"What was he dressed like?" she asked as a thought came to her.

"Like a harlequin, or rather, in rags, I should say. Bearded like a pard. Why do you ask?"

"I met him to-night. I almost spoke to him."

"Spoke to him? What on earth for?"

She made an evasive gesture. She would not tell him it was because she had seen that rough man shed tears. In aftertime she was glad of it.

"Otherwise quite a decent sort," Jocelyn continued moodily. "Said I could consider the Priory my home. Talked about giving me an allowance."

"And are you going to take it?"

"Of course. Beggars can't be choosers."

"Since when are you a beggar, Jocelyn?"

"Since about half an hour ago."

"You're not, Jocelyn. You're a millionaire."

"Certainly. I own you."

"No, dear," she cried with shining eyes. "All the world's your own. You've only got to take it, Jocelyn. Surely you're not going to eat the bread of charity when you've untold riches in yourself? There's your youth, your health, your two strong arms. They're meant for something more than to embrace a woman with."

"Yes, they're making that new road to Lynton."

"Oh, don't talk like that, Jocelyn."

"Or I could ask cousin Clem for a job as chauffeur. That's about the limit of my accomplishments."

"Jocelyn, dear, won't you understand? There's Canada, Australia—whole continents for you to conquer. I hear the land calling for you. The wide waste wilderness is imploring you to come and turn it into a garden. Jocelyn, go and peg out your claim." She paused, not noting his surprise, and went on in a sort of ecstasy. "And meanwhile I'll remain here, waiting for you, praying for you, trusting you. And then, when your log-hut is ready, come for me,

and I'll enter that humble log-hut as proud as a queen on her coronation day."

"You're getting excited, my dear," he said with a grimace. "Jocelyn Webster to become a squatter?"

"Jocelyn Webster to become a man—my man!"

"Very fine, as a sentiment. But I can hardly say the idea appeals to me. And besides, even that would require money."

"Jocelyn, I have about a hundred pounds saved up."

"Thanks. About enough to pay my passage and stock me in cigarettes."

"Then you must ask *him* for it," she said fiercely.

"Yes, but wouldn't that be taking alms?"

"Not at all. As head of the house it's his duty to give the younger members of the family a proper start in life."

He sat, looking very dubious. Then he said:

"I must think it over," which seemed to be a habit of his.

"No, no, ask him at once. To-night."

"All right. I'll speak to him to-night," he said with sudden alacrity.

"Promise—faithfully?"

"Oh, Hazel!"

And then, the practical part of the interview being over, Romance entered and held the stage till the fall of the curtain.

It was eleven o'clock when Jocelyn got back to the Priory. As he had anticipated, he found Sir Clement up. The new master had not spent such a solitary evening after all. He had improved the occasion by becoming acquainted with his servants. Mr. Pew headed the crowd, profusely apologetic for his mistake. Sir Clement quickly put his mind at rest.

Among the whole host of menials there was not one who did not speedily come to the conclusion that this was a mas-

ter to be proud of—and probably loved. Snobbery is the sentiment uppermost among the retainers of every great house in England. But they none of them felt it towards this man attired worse than the meanest of them. The grip of his calloused hands—fancy Mr. Jocelyn shaking hands with 'em!—was an inspiring message. They went away with the conviction that they were serving indeed under a Master of Men.

Sir Clement turned with a smile of welcome as Jocelyn entered.

"Well, Joss, have you made up your mind?" he asked cheerily.

"Yes, I'll stay, if you'll make the allowance big enough."

Sir Clement laughed. He liked the frank ingenuousness of the boy.

"I'll see that you have no reason to complain."

And then they talked far into the night.

And poor Hazel was meanwhile dreaming blissful dreams of Jocelyn, a Bayard pure and immaculate, whose heart harbored no falsehood and whose lips uttered none.



CHAPTER IV

AT THE ARCHDEACONRY

AND now for our promised visit to the archdeaconry.

A disappointment awaits us here at the start, for it isn't an archdeaconry at all. An archdeaconry should, by an extension of the famous definition, be a place containing an archidiaconal person. But this one had not housed such a person within the living memory of men. Its name was a misleading survival. Yet it was because of its nomenclature that Mr. Hobhouse had acquired it. Which would seem to settle the vexed question—what's in a name?

Mr. Robert Hobhouse's own name had stood high in the magic square mile which is said to be the most valuable in the world. Thomas Hobhouse & Son had been a small and private, though reputable, banking firm in the purlieus of Throgmorton Street. Of Thomas Hobhouse's two sons, Robert, the younger, had gone up to Cambridge to study for Holy Orders, while the elder one had gone into the bank to assist his father.

But this elder son had been improvident enough to meet with an Alpine accident and more improvident still to lose his life in it. Upon that Robert had obeyed the parental S. O. S., renounced his spiritual aspirations with a heavy heart and, from qualifying for a minister of the true God, had turned into a votary of Mammon.

But he had always been a banker only by profession. By predilection he had remained a scholar, though but a dilettante one. And at the first possible moment, that is, when he was forty-five, and Kenneth, his only offspring,

fifteen, he had accepted a rather advantageous offer from a voracious syndicate which had hungrily swallowed up such small concerns as his, and had retired into private life. This was rather a mistake, as it now appeared to him, thinking ruefully of his feckless son, who had made rather a mess of everything he had touched. There would be very little left for Kenneth in the end, for the second Mrs. Hobhouse had been rather exacting in the matter of marriage settlements.

From under the superimposed litter of quotations and exchange Mr. Hobhouse had unearthed what little Greek and Hebrew remained to him from his two years of preparation for the Theological Tripos, and had set himself to the making of books. These he published at his own expense —surreptitiously, for Mrs. Hobhouse kept a tight hold on the family purse. As a rule these books achieved a line or two of perfunctory notice in the lesser homiletical reviews.

But at last he was coming into his own. He was now at work on his "Eschatology of the Apocrypha," which was bound to create a sensation. The subject was esoteric and great, the title an inspiration. He mouthed it lovingly. He would prove to his detractors—envious crew!—that he was worthy of living in a house miscalled the "archdeaconry."

Mrs. Hobhouse, being of a rather more worldly disposition, chafed at the pseudo-ecclesiastic appellation of their home. She had remonstrated about it with her husband time and again.

"We can't go on living here under false pretenses, Robert. You're no more an archdeacon than I am Ninon de l'Enclos."

"That's true," he assented absently, forgetting the implied aspersion on his wife's charms.

"We must change the name. I don't care if you have to do it by letters patent or application to the College of Heralds. I want to call the place 'Aurora Cottage.'"

"A beautiful conceit, my darling, one that does justice to your poetic disposition. But there's Sir Jacques, at the Priory. He's hardly more of a prior than I am of an archdeacon."

"Stuff and nonsense! To compare this hovel with the Priory. One of the stately homes of England, with historic associations reaching back to the Conquest! To change the name of the Priory would be to pull down the whole grand fabric of the Middle Ages."

"I admire the phrase, my dear, though personally I don't see anything grand about the Middle Ages. But somehow I've got a fancy for going to bed at the same address at which I got up in the morning. Oblige me and don't insist. You can do as you like when I'm dead."

"Then I'll live at Aurora Cottage and you can stay at the archdeaconry."

"Won't that give rise to misconceptions? People will say I've run away from you, or you from me."

"Oh, I have no patience with you!" she cried, flouncing out.

And, greatly to his own surprise, he had, so far, carried the day. It did not happen to him very often.

Sir Jacques had frequently consulted him about investments and he had, in a way, become financial adviser to the Priory. As such he, or rather Mrs. Hobhouse, had deemed it his duty to call on the new owner, but he had not been fortunate enough to find him at home. The good man had left a note, embodying an invitation, which two days later, on his return from town, Sir Clement had cordially accepted.

And now he was expected for lunch. The air of sup-

pressed excitement in the mock-archidiaconal drawing-room spoke of various emotions. Mrs. Hobhouse, a fine, well-preserved woman of fifty-five, was sitting up in her most straight-backed and ceremonious manner, radiating an atmosphere of unctuous self-importance.

Present also was Josephine, her daughter by her first marriage, a rather large and languid person, a little past her first bloom, but still good-looking, despite a complexion somewhat dull and pasty—her dearest friends went so far as to call it "muddy." But she carried herself with admirable poise as she stood peering out through the curtain-slit for the expected visitor. Rather over-blown she looked, like a belated sun-flower near to the wilting-point, but otherwise very chic and *comme-il-faut*.

Mr. Hobhouse, of course, was there as well, though he looked uncommonly like a negligible after-thought tacked on at the last moment. He appeared very attentive to all that passed, but in secret he was lamenting the waste of time which could have been so much more profitably expended on the "Eschatology."

"What an irritating habit you have of always doing the wrong thing, Robert," Mrs. Hobhouse was saying. "Fancy calling on a man and not finding him at home."

"I believe that happens to the best of us," Mr. Hobhouse protested mildly.

"Yes, I dare say. But I asked you to call early and you didn't go till noon."

"Sir Clement had left for town by the seven o'clock train, my dear."

"What an unearthly hour! But, of course, from the reports that have reached us, he is quite likely to do very unusual things. What bothers me is that I don't know what attitude to assume."

"Attitude?"

"Well, one must assume an attitude. Robert, you knew him before he went away. Give me some idea of him."

"I remember him as a nice, gentlemanly boy."

"His gentlemanliness is, I dare say, a little the worse for wear. Fancy turning up in navvy's clothes to enter on such a magnificent inheritance. Poor dear Sir Jacques would writhe in his grave if he knew of such a thing."

"Yes, Sir Jacques always studied the proprieties," Mr. Hobhouse agreed.

"He was positively the pink of form," put in Josephine.

"Josephine, the expression savors of slang—you know I don't like that," said Mrs. Hobhouse disagreeably. "If I had been there I should have read him a lesson."

"All the same, my dear, we must be charitable," observed Mr. Hobhouse.

"Oh, keep your platitudes for your books which nobody reads," said Mrs. Hobhouse with scorn. "Fancy springing himself on us like that. I admire Jocelyn immensely. I always knew he had a noble nature. How wonderfully he is bearing up under his calamity. I really think he ought to have remained submerged to the end of his days," she concluded, with a wild confusion of pronouns.

"Whom are you chewing to rags now?"

The door was flung wide, and there entered a youngish man with a rolling eye and a gloomy haggardness of face.

"Kenneth, how often must I ask you not to come in as if shot from a cannon?" cried Mrs. Hobhouse all of a flutter. "You're ruining my nerves. I don't know what's come over you. You're getting worse and worse. I wish you'd go back to London."

"Yes, I'm going there, or somewhere else," replied her stepson grimly. "But knowing whom you're expecting, I suppose you're at work on Clem."

"It's no concern of yours," said Mrs. Hobhouse crossly.

"Mother thinks Sir Clement a wild man from the bush —a perfect barbarian," laughed Josephine.

"A barbarian? The chap who won the prize for Greek Elegiacs at Harrow? What do you say to that, pater?"

"A barbarian, my dear," said Mr. Hobhouse, turning eagerly on his wife, bursting with the chance of showing his learning, "is, in the literal sense, a person who was unable to speak Greek. And Elegiacs. . . ."

"Oh, pickle your pedantry!" Mrs. Hobhouse interrupted him rudely. "I don't care a rap whether he won the prize for alley-giants or any other kind of giants. I think his conduct is most reprehensible."

"Depends on the point of view," said Kenneth curtly.

"I won't allow you to entangle me in an argument," said Mrs. Hobhouse haughtily.

"I shouldn't advise you to."

"Are you staying to lunch, Ken?" Mr. Hobhouse interposed hastily.

"No, thanks."

"What? And you and Clement such old friends? You ought at least to congratulate him."

"Perhaps that's just why I won't stay," said Kenneth with enigmatic grimness. "I leave him to your tender mercies. I think he can take care of himself."

And with that he was gone.

Whatever his other shortcomings, Mrs. Hobhouse had nothing to complain of in the matter of her visitor's punctuality. At one o'clock to the minute he was announced. He had come up through the garden instead of by the drive, and so Josephine was balked of her first reconnoitering peep. For a very brief while Mrs. Hobhouse was at a loss whether to be glad or sorry to have been wrong in her gloomy anticipations.

But very soon she decided to be glad. There was a

ruggedness about the man which differentiated him, not altogether, as she thought, to his disadvantage, from the smooth gentlemen who frequented her drawing-room. He had not left his gentlemanliness fluttering about on thorn-bushes in the wild. He was perfectly correct, even to his finger-nails. Mrs. Hobhouse did not approve of beards, however well trimmed. But perhaps he could be induced to shave. He looked the sort of man whose roughnesses could be easily planed away.

And half way through the meal she glanced from Sir Clement to Josephine, who was certainly showing at her best, and thought her own thoughts. But—horror! Perhaps he was already married, with an unpresentable wife and a bunch of pickaninnies in the backwoods. That, however, could be easily ascertained.

"When do you propose to bring your family over, Sir Clement?" she asked sweetly.

"When I have one," he answered with a smile.

Mrs. Hobhouse drew a breath of relief. So the way was clear. At all events, they had the start over everybody else, and a start means a good deal in a race.

"Josephine, perhaps Sir Clement would like you to show him over the school this afternoon."

"Would you, Sir Clement?" asked Josephine, glancing up at him coyly under her long lashes.

"I should like it immensely," was his prompt reply.

Mrs. Hobhouse watched them walking away, her hands clasped in a sort of maternal benediction. Already she saw herself installed at the Priory, ruling it with a rod of iron.

Josephine was certainly full of the school. She informed him modestly that she was Chairman of the Welfare Committee. She had adopted a tone of girlish ingenuousness which jarred on him considerably. So Sir Clement did

not even know that there was a school in the village. Oh, of course, it had only been built three years ago, the crowning benefaction of that great and good man, his uncle, Sir Jacques.

Already it had achieved wonderful results. One of the boys had won an entrance scholarship at the neighboring grammar school. Two of the girls had come out top in the needlework examination for the county. She hoped Sir Clement would take an active interest in the work. Ah, that was most kind of him. What more noble and altruistic joy could there be than improving the minds and bodies of other people's children?

"Hm, yes," Sir Clement assented gravely.

CHAPTER V

THE MADONNA OF THE SCHOOLROOM

As they approached the schoolhouse, they were met by the sound of fresh young voices. Blending with them was a girl's mezzo, singing in seconds, giving color to the song, putting a soul into it. Josephine slowed her pace and listened with a frown. Then she hurried on impetuously, opening the door of the room without knocking and signing Sir Clement to follow. She did not see the displeased look with which he complied.

The young mistress gave them a hasty glance and a curt nod. But beyond that she ignored their presence, calmly wielding her baton to the end of the song. Josephine stood tapping her foot impatiently, but obviously not with any idea of beating time.

The girl of the meadows! Sir Clement felt a sudden tightening at his heart. There swept through him a wave of awe, of reverence. Upon him was a sense of apocalypse. He knew now how the early worshipers had felt on seeing for the first time the face of the young Madonna. His instant thought was—what was this glorious child doing here, spending her luminous days in hard and thankless drudgery? She seemed to be asking herself that question too. The proud, almost ascetic lips did not speak revolt, but a supreme disdain, a rising high above her surroundings. That too he had seen in her acknowledgment of Josephine.

As for himself, he had noted a rather strange happening. As her gaze had brushed his face, it had seemed in-

stinct with a tinge of malevolence, of darting dislike. Coming from those dreamy, pellucid eyes, it had been like a javelin of forked flame out of a serene sky. Or had he only imagined it? It was quite possible, for his power of judgment seemed to have become blunted for the time.

He could not think, he could only feel. And even what he felt he could not say. Was it that some wonderful thing had entered his life, a glory that surpassed his dreams? He did not hear the singing with his outward ear. It was drowned by a flood of melody in his heart, where a captive bird seemed to have been suddenly let loose and gone caroling jubilantly to the skies. It was absurd. He looked round shamefacedly, as if to see whether there was anybody laughing at his folly.

The children had stopped. Josephine seemed to have reached the limit of her patience. She almost pounced on the young mistress.

"Where's Miss Witherspoon?" she asked disagreeably.

"Not here. Ill. Neuralgia."

"You lodge with her, don't you?"

"Yes. She is sending a doctor's certificate."

Josephine turned on Sir Clement with a wry laugh.

"You are unfortunate, Sir Clement. Hamlet without the Prince. The school is absolutely lost without Miss Witherspoon. She has her faults, but otherwise is a most capable headmistress. I'm sure, Miss Middleton, if she had been here she would not have allowed the children to sing: 'Three Fishers Went Sailing.' I didn't want to interrupt you, but . . ."

"What objection is there to the song, Miss Clavering?"

"It's altogether too sad. We want to put all the brightness we can into their young lives."

"It's on the approved list."

"Is it? How foolish. I shall have it struck off."

"I love the song," said Miss Middleton softly.

"Ah, I see. Well, Miss Middleton, I think it's time you knew you are not here to study your private preferences. The interest of the children comes first. That is the sign of a good teacher—discretion."

"Yes, Miss Clavering, discretion."

Josephine shot her a wrathful look. The pure lips had not curved, but from each corner of the mouth a little sprite of mischief seemed peering out. Josephine became very dignified.

"There is a certain matter that concerns you, Miss Middleton, but I'm not sure that I ought not to let it go through the official channels."

"As you please, Miss Clavering."

"But perhaps it would only be fair to put you on your guard."

"I'm much obliged to you, Miss Clavering."

"It has come to my knowledge that you paid a visit to the village during school hours. Is that so?"

"It is."

"I presume you know that is against the regulations."

"I do."

"I hope you have an explanation."

"I have. I shall give it to the Governors."

"As you please, Miss Middleton." Miss Clavering seemed to hurl Miss Middleton's phrase back at her with great gusto. "Shall we go, Sir Clement? I will just show you over the premises and then we must come another day."

"With the greatest of pleasure, Miss Clavering."

But he did not move and stood twirling the tip of his beard with some irresolution.

"I was thinking—before we go—perhaps I may be allowed to suggest that Miss Middleton give her explana-

tion now. I'm sure it's a perfectly good one. I'm not greatly experienced in these things, but I should judge that an appearance before the Governors, however satisfactory the termination, always leaves some sort of a stigma."

"You are quite right in that. But, it seems, Miss Middleton has made her decision," came dryly from Josephine.

Hazel looked at Sir Clement, making a great effort to battle down the surprise she felt. The words sounded kindly, well-meant—a favor. Was she to accept favors from the man who had shown himself her greatest enemy? He had refused favors to her dearest. Jocelyn had told her that, after a high and heated argument, Sir Clement had point-blank denied him the thousand pounds he had asked for to set him up abroad, although he had, of course, not forgotten to mention repayment. Sir Clement had no money to waste on hare-brained schemes. Jocelyn must either accept the allowance he offered or leave it.

And what could poor Jocelyn do? He had accepted the paltry sum—Jocelyn had stated it at a quarter the figure it really was—with the reservation of flinging it back in his face as soon as he could afford. Here was a curmudgeon with no tinge of generosity in his nature, intent on chaining his equals to his chariot-wheels and driving them along as slaves, a man, mean and contemptible, not worthy of the name.

And then in a flash it came to her. His words were a trap. Some manner of chicanery lurked behind them, as there must behind everything he said. She threw up her head as if to a challenge. His almost anxious eagerness and Miss Clavering's provocative smile decided her. Her story welled out with a rush.

"Jacky Dobson had come to school and had said there was illness at home. With Miss Witherspoon's permis-

sion I took him back at once, in case there was anything infectious. Fortunately there was not. I came straight back."

Sir Clement watched her heightened color and almost hated himself for having degraded her into an apology. But at the same time he felt a curious relief.

"That sounds perfectly satisfactory," he said presently.

"Perfectly, but, of course, the facts will have to be verified."

And without a word of leave-taking, as she had come without any formula of greeting, Miss Clavering turned to go. Sir Clement stood for a moment or two, on the point of a salute, but the young mistress with the Madonna face, in which tragedy and the joy of life blended so strangely, had turned an obstinate back and was fumbling in her cupboard.

"Good afternoon, Miss Middleton," he said finally.

But the class broke into a clamorous response, as they had been drilled to do on the departure of visitors, and he could therefore not tell whether the young mistress had joined in it.

"A most irritating girl, that," said Josephine with a toss of her shapely head. "She absolutely refuses to learn her station, which, of course, is detrimental to her teaching. She will not 'ma'am' any of the ladies of the Committee. You noticed how rudely, how flippantly almost, she spoke to me."

"She looks as if she has had trouble," said Sir Clement absently.

"That she has, in plenty, poor thing. You didn't know Captain Middleton, did you? Of course not, you couldn't. Two years after he had settled here, his wife, whom he worshiped, left him, taking the younger child with her. He

had ample evidence and obtained a decree nisi. The older girl, Miss Middleton, to her credit, be it said, stuck to the father. He could have claimed custody of the younger girl too, but they say he was too proud to ask her to come back. Besides, after a while, the lady and the child disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up. And the Captain settled his troubles—with a bullet through the brain."

"What a sad story," said Sir Clement gravely.

"Ah, all life is very sad."

And with this original and abysmally profound remark Miss Clavering waxed philosophical and platitudinized, or more correctly, attitudinized, till they got back to the archdeaconry. There Sir Clement took his leave, declining an invitation to tea. Mrs. Hobhouse did not press him, knowing it unwise to protract first impressions. So they would take quicker and deeper root.

Unfortunately for Mrs. Hobhouse's hopes, this fact had already been exemplified for Sir Clement that afternoon. He had not forgotten his first meeting with the girl, but it had been so fugitive that it could be said not to count. There in the schoolroom he had met her own bright entity, a breathing flashing personality as real as the sun at noon. No, nothing so fierce, so flaming. Rather was hers the purity, the freshness of dewy morning. He trod delicately, as though not to bruise the crocuses and marigolds that seemed own kin to her.

He wondered if she would have made a stronger appeal to him if he had known her pitiful history at the time. Probably not. The power she exercised over him was intrinsic, elemental—it needed no adventitious aid. He resented that power. He had always been a free man. Ever since the Flossie incident, or perhaps rather because of it, women had not existed for him. He did not feel be-

holden to this young girl who had rediscovered for him the species.

He thought about it, as he strolled back slowly, puzzling the inwardness of it. She had dawned on him with no surprise, but almost with a sense of predestination. And more than that. Starting from her, he seemed to go back, in an almost straight line, to that fatal night on the karoo. Dallas had not troubled him much on the journey. But now that he had settled down to a leisured routine, he knew that surely and inevitably Will Dallas would come into his own again.

What, however, in heaven's name, could be the connection between Will Dallas and the Madonna of the schoolroom? Her father had shot himself in England. Dallas had certainly not been her mother's paramour—the dates didn't tally. As far as he knew about Dallas the latter did not have a blood relation in the world, save his brother Charley. And yet, in some indefinable way, the dead man and this girl were linked together in his mind. And somehow a queer notion came to him that Dallas knew of it in his grave and gloated upon it, his mouth twisted awry, grinning his ghastly grin.

He tried to dismiss the thought with a weary shrug of his shoulders. For the first time it struck him that he was going to be the victim of strange obsessions. But he would hold them at arm's length as long as he could. He would enjoy the beauty of the world and wait for the shadows to swathe him. When the time came, the goblins could make their sport of him. He breathed deep and filled his lungs with the balmy vesper air.

Some distance ahead he saw a man sitting on a stile he had to cross. He drew close. The man must have heard him, but he did not move. The smoke from his pipe came up in moody whiffs. Sir Clement was about to ask the

surly fellow to make way, when, instead, he uttered a quick exclamation of pleasure and clapped the other heartily on the shoulder.

"Ken, by all that's unholy!" he cried.

Ken screwed round his head with no appearance of haste.

"How do, Sir Clement?" he asked stiffly.

"Sir Clement! Ken, I always knew you were a crabbed apple, but I never expected you to greet me like this."

"You can't get all you expect."

"The devil—what am I to make of this, Ken? I knew you didn't want to see me, or you would have stayed at home. I asked after you at table. Well, I've run you to earth anyhow."

Kenneth gave him a strange look.

"If you want to know the truth, old son—I hate meeting successful men."

"How am I successful?"

"You succeeded, didn't you?"

"As a play on words it may pass, but as common sense—rotten," Sir Clement said angrily. "I want to know if you're going to shake hands with me."

"Oh, I'll do that, if it gives you any satisfaction."

"Ken, what's become of your grip?"

"All gone—with the other things. I say, old chap, while I've got the chance I want to tip you a wheeze. They're spreading their nets for you over there. Oh, Josephine is all right, not a bad sort under her skin. Rather good-looking too when faked up. I don't want to queer their pitch. If you're fool enough to let 'em land you, good luck to them. All the same, I think you ought to be put on your guard."

"Thanks," laughed Sir Clement. "I know bait when I see it."

"Exactly what I told 'em," and Ken echoed his laugh rather wildly. "Well, that's about all. If you're staying, I'd better get a move on."

"Not a step till you've told me about the other things you mentioned before."

"Other things? Oh, some other time."

"Ken, you're in trouble."

"Am I? The first I hear of it."

"Look here, old chap. By all the black eyes we have given each other I conjure you to look on me as a friend."

Kenneth fixed him with a long hard stare.

"By Jove, I think you meant that," he delivered himself at last.

"Have you ever known me to say anything I didn't mean?"

"N-no." Kenneth shrugged. "Damn your inquisitiveness. I suppose I've got to tell you. I'm in business. I have a partner. Checks signed by both of us. I was smitten by the get-rich-quick fever. Stock Exchange, betting. Lost and lost. To pay losses I saved him the trouble of signing various checks. The day after to-morrow is the half-yearly audit, and there'll be an unholy row. I shouldn't have told you, but as I'll never see you again it doesn't matter."

"He'll be reasonable. You'll come to an arrangement."

"Not he. He's a hard-bitten old Puritan, always ready to give the devil his own. He'll put me in quod as sure as eggs is eggs."

"To avoid which you mean to do what?"

"Go to the ends of the earth—and then further."

"You won't. You'll stay here."

"They won't let me. I won't have much say in my whereabouts."

"Your father?"

"No good telling him. Helpless. The old mare, his wife, will only be too pleased to be shot of me at any price."

"Ken, I want a steward on the estate."

"Advertise. You'll get 'em by the bushel."

"But I want you."

"Me? That's good. I don't know a swede from a mangelwurzel."

"You'll learn. I'll advance you the missing sum and deduct it from your salary."

The other spun round and looked at him as though dazed. Then gradually the despairing savagery oozed from his eyes and they became shiny with something else.

"Clem," he faltered, "by God, you're the whitest man I ever saw."

"Then treat me like one."

"I will. No, I won't thank you now. I'll do that later when I've got my wits back. But here's something on account."

And this time his hand had more of a grip in it.

"All right, Ken. Come home with me to supper and we'll get everything shipshape."

They walked on in silence. As they passed the artificial lake, Ken took from his pocket a bright-gleaming thing and threw it into the water.

"That's that," he muttered.

Sir Clement thought at the moment only that he had saved a valuable life. He did not dream that what he had saved would one day prove an even more valuable asset for himself.

CHAPTER VI

MUTATIS MUTANDIS

THERE had been many callers at the Priory, from the Lord-lieutenant downward.

This morning there came a deputation, consisting of old Mr. Hobhouse, several of the big local landowners and some rubicund squires, of the fox-hunting, port-bibbing type, rabid Tories, one and all. They asked Sir Clement to represent the constituency in Parliament. There would be no contest—it would be a walk-over.

Sir Clement had spoken his mind pretty freely. "No contest?" he had asked hotly. And he called them an oligarchic caucus who robbed the people of their votes. Yes, he would stand for election, but it would be as a Radical, or even on the Labor ticket. The deputationists had withdrawn disgruntled, fleas in their ears. They had threatened, if he carried out his intention, to put up a strong opponent.

"You're making yourself dreadfully unpopular," sniggered Jocelyn, who had been present at the interview.

"I confess," said Sir Clement, a deep introspective look in his eyes, "that I have a great longing to be left to myself. By the way, Joss, I'm going to pay a duty-call at the school. I haven't yet met the headmistress. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, I'll come," said Jocelyn with alacrity.

Sir Clement was greatly desirous to see again the young mistress with the Madonna face. He would not wait to be

ciceroned by Miss Clavering. He wondered. What part was this young girl going to play in his future and what was that intangible connection of hers with his past? Perhaps the more he saw of her, the more quickly he would find the key to the riddle. Miss Witherspoon made a good pretext for his call.

He liked, at first glance, this squat, almost four-square little woman, with the iron-gray hair, rather owlish face and steel-blue, quick-twinkling eyes.

"I'm sorry I didn't meet you the other day, Miss Witherspoon," he said kindly. "I hope you are better."

"I am, or I should hardly be here," was the almost brusque reply.

"I'm taking the earliest possible opportunity of making your acquaintance. The school appears to be the apple of the local eye."

"I've tried to make it a credit to everybody concerned."

"And succeeded. Is there anything I can do to help you in your work? I shall be only too delighted."

"There is. Please tell the ladies of the School Welfare Committee not to come and bother me or my assistant. Or else it will soon be all welfare and no school."

Sir Clement laughed. "Yes, Miss Witherspoon, I can quite imagine that people with the best intentions are often very trying."

She made no answer. He thought he detected in her an air of hostility. She had turned and was chatting volubly to Jocelyn in a way that contrasted rather glaringly with her taciturnity to himself. He took advantage of a pause in the conversation.

"Well, Joss, we mustn't waste any more of Miss Witherspoon's time. Even I, as head of the governing body, am not allowed to do that," he said with a lame attempt at humor. "But, if I may, I—I should like to say how-do-

you-do to Miss Middleton. I'm afraid she hasn't very pleasant recollections of my previous visit."

"Certainly, Sir Clement," Miss Witherspoon replied coldly.

She led the way to the other room. He heard her before he saw her. She was talking vivaciously to the class. As he entered he felt a sudden tightening of his breath, as if he had been translated to an immense altitude, a rarer atmosphere. He grew very angry with himself. This nonsense had got to stop. He could not allow this supercilious girl to juggle with all the values of his life.

And then he saw something that gave him still further pause. She had ceased talking, was looking up with half-parted lips. And at that moment a quick light leapt past him from her eyes and lost itself somewhere at the back of him. For whom had it been meant, that wonderful flash —Miss Witherspoon or Jocelyn? He held on to himself with iron self-restraint. He would not demean himself to look. It was no business of his, anyway.

He went up to her, bowing stiffly.

"I haven't really been properly introduced to you, Miss Middleton," he said lightly.

"Oh, that doesn't matter," she replied and turned back to her class.

It was the snub direct, but administered so airily, dexterously almost, that it gave no handle for offense. Miss Clavering was right. She brooked no master, feared no authority. Strong in the sense of duty done, she gazed fearlessly out upon the world. He bit his lip. His visit had not been a success. He had done a clumsy, blundering thing in coming. He felt singularly superfluous, as much out of place as an elephant in a rose garden. He turned abruptly, as though in flight. But for whom had she meant that welcoming flash?

Jocelyn was rather long over his leave-taking, so long that Sir Clement decided not to wait for him. And he preferred his own company as he struck off home across the fields. Jocelyn had such a prying way with him. It was not good that Jocelyn should know what he hid.

He had not gone far when he heard a shout and saw Waggles running towards him. The old gamekeeper looked haggard and perturbed. Sir Clement eyed him sympathetically.

"Anything the matter, Waggles?"

"Dreadful things, Sir Clement." The man spoke with an air of hushed awe. "There's been murder on the estate, Sir Clement. Murder!"

Sir Clement felt a great shock. Despite his turbulence of spirit, he had been conscious of a vague restfulness trying to worm its way into him. The peaceful backwater he had just left, the innocence of the children, the placid tranquillity of that Madonna face could not but work a soothing effect. And here he was being plunged back again into the vortex of ugly and distressing happenings. Murder! The word came closely home to him. It had a personal ring that jangled his soul discordantly.

"Who murdered whom, Waggles?"

"Tom Wagstaff did for Jerry Bowles. Poor Jerry, he was a bad lot, but I don't know that he quite deserved being cut off like that."

"How did it happen, and where?"

"In their hut. They both lived together. . . ."

"Lived together, did they?" Sir Clement asked quickly.

"Though what they was living on, deuce knows. Poaching mostly, I suspect. Thick as thieves, the pair, that bein' undoubtedly what they was. What took place ain't certain yet. Seems there was a row and Tom stuck a knife in Jerry's gizzard. Tom was just packing up to do a bunk,

when Farmer Skidmore with two of his men looked in to have a few words with 'em about some traps he had found in his field, and there they saw Jerry all crumpled up. Tom swears it was an accident."

And then something happened that startled Waggles considerably. Sir Clement broke into a great guffaw. Waggles looked at him aghast.

"Sir Clement, for goodness' sake, what's come over you?"

Sir Clement's eyes had a terrifying glassy stare in them. Then his teeth came together with a snap. His hand was fumbling in the air, as though groping for the self-control he had lost. And presently he seemed to find it again.

"Sorry, Waggles. But that murder story of yours made me think of something funny. Tell me—is there anything I can do in the matter?"

"Not that I knows of, Sir Clement. To-morrow's the inquest, in case you'd like to attend."

"I'll see, Waggles. So long."

Waggles looked after him, shaking his head. To laugh at a murder! What a queer thing for Sir Clement to do! And he always so sane and level-headed. Ah, that came o' livin' in them hot trippical countries. There was that nephew of his, Waggles, who had sunstroke in India. . . . Poor Sir Clement!

Poor Sir Clement walked on rapidly. What an ironic coincidence! Murder was common enough, but of all the myriad shapes it might take, why had it taken just the one that was on all fours with his own—all but the discovery? Tom Wagstaff was to begin his trial to-morrow. But it would not be Tom Wagstaff—it would be Sir Clement Barradine, vicariously. And Sir Clement Barradine, since he would be in the dock, had better go and see how it worked out.

He was among the earliest arrivals at the Court, being at

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once accommodated with a seat at the coroner's table. Tom Wagstaff was brought in, having elected to give evidence. He was a stocky, undersized fellow with a bullet head, and from his dazed look it was patent that he had still not grasped the gravity of his predicament. The preliminaries of the arrest were taken. Then Farmer Skidmore told his story and Tom Wagstaff told his.

He had quarreled with Jerry, having accused him of stealing a rabbit. Words had led to blows. In the struggle Jerry had drawn a knife. Tom had tried to wrest it from him, and by an unfortunate turn had plunged it into Jerry's throat, severing the jugular vein.

The prosecution brought out that the knife by which Jerry had died was Tom's. It had his name engraved on the hilt. Tom denied it. The knife *had* belonged to him, but some weeks ago he had swapped it for a pair of boots which Jerry had somehow acquired. He had not had the slightest intention of killing Jerry. With stormy intervals they had been the best of pals. And the prisoner broke down completely and blubbered bitterly.

The coroner summed up the depositions, making mincemeat of Tom's asseverations and denials. The jury of twelve "lawful" men unhesitatingly and unanimously brought in a verdict, "Guilty of Murder"—and Sir Clement Barradine stood committed to the Assizes.

Yes, that was how it would have fared with him if he had been standing on his own trial. He was perfectly convinced that Tom Wagstaff was not guilty of malice or intent. They could not, or would not see that the accused, of low mental caliber, dull-witted and heavy, could never have invented his ingenious tale as to the transfer of the knife during the few hours which he had apparently spent in a state of torpid bewilderment.

Sir Clement's interest and astonishment had gone from

point to point as the hearing had proceeded. Already in Waggles' scrappy account, and more clearly still as the case unfolded itself before the coroner, he saw that, detail for detail, feature for feature, it was an absolute facsimile of his own. The only trifling difference was that here the knife was the vital question, there the revolver. And he knew that his jury would have given him no more credence than this one had given Tom Wagstaff. And Tom's doom would have been his.

His burning brain refused to let him reason it out for the time being. When he had brushed the cobwebs from his head he would try and see how he stood. But the matter was not to be left to him after all. It was to be expounded to him in words of flame as significant as those which Belshazzar had seen on the wall.

CHAPTER VII

SIR CLEMENT EXPLAINS HIMSELF

AND in no very long time either—the next day, in fact. It was Sunday and he decided to go to Evensong, more from a sense of *noblesse oblige* than from any strong inner impulse. The parish people would no doubt like to see him. It was practically his first public appearance amongst them.

In the porch of the church a tall slim figure passed him. With a quick movement he raised his hat. She acknowledged him with a curt bow and walked rapidly in. An inward glow suffused him. He had forgotten he would probably see her here. It gave him a bitter-sweet pleasure to know that for a while they would be contained within the same four walls.

The church, as he entered, was almost full. As he passed up the aisle, the people rose to their feet. The act of feudal servility affected him disagreeably. He would make it known that in future he wished it omitted.

The service began. At the first sound of the choir he knew where to look for her. The rich mellow mezzo, penetrating all the other voices, could not be mistaken. He knew now what was the elusive echo that had pursued him, waking and sleeping, since that singing-lesson at the school.

And now the preacher ascended the pulpit, the Rev. Ambrose Fotheringham, of Swinton-in-Furness, lanky, cadaverous, but of undoubted distinction in mien and manner. He had good connections, delivered excellent sermons, and Mrs. Hobhouse had long ago marked him down as a fall-back for Josephine. His earnest eyes were fixed on Sir

Clement, the dispensing patron of several good livings, one of which the Rev. Ambrose was exceedingly anxious to exchange for his present rather meager cure. And from Sir Clement his gaze traveled yearningly to Josephine, who sat just underneath him, clasping her prayer-book, the picture of Christian devotion and humility. She was ice to him, his beautiful one, but he would never give up hope. And if he came to her, as vicar, for instance, of . . .

The congregation was waiting, expectant, tense. They knew that this day had a significance of its own. And as the preacher gave out his text, everybody knew what was coming and nudged everybody else. Mrs. Hobhouse nodded approvingly. Dear Ambrose was always so topical—that was the success of his sermons. Her heart bled at the thought of the disappointment that was probably in store for the poor boy.

"And God said unto Cain, where is thy brother Abel?" was the text.

The Rev. Fotheringham noted the effect on Sir Clement, and it exceeded his expectations. Sir Clement sat hunched up, shrinking into himself, his features a study of concentrated interest. The preacher rejoiced exceedingly. If he could impress the patron like that merely by his text, then the battle was as good as won. And he threw himself, heart and soul, in the task before him.

He harped, in feeling terms, on the shadow that had fallen on that God-fearing community. They were none of them free from stain, but the terrible sin of blood-guiltiness had so far been spared to them and, by the loving-kindness of heaven, it would be an isolated example and a shuddering moral. He dared not speak freely on the subject, it being *sub judice*—he rolled out the phrase with unction, knowing it to be above the heads of most of his hearers—but on one aspect of it he could dilate without reservation.

Grievously stricken as their poor sinful brother had been, yet there had been vouchsafed to him an act of crowning mercy. He had been caught up against the temptation to escape. God had sent the messenger of justice and he would be given a chance of expiation, if his judges held that such was to be his portion. But how terrible for him if the law had not laid upon him its retributory hand and he had been left free to go where he listed, staggering along under the burden of guilt, if guilt it was. Thus at least he was saved from the greatest sin of all, the sin against himself, had been given a chance of making his peace with God and man. And now they would pray for his redemption and the redeeming of all whose feet had openly or in secret strayed from the paths of righteousness.

And glancing sideways from under piously downcast eyes, the Rev. Ambrose saw that Sir Clement approved. He was staring fixedly in front of him, nodding assent. The Rev. Ambrose was casting about in his mind for a suitable reply to Sir Clement's forthcoming congratulations. But to his dismay he saw Sir Clement walk straight out of church at the conclusion of the service, making his way through the out-thronging worshipers, looking neither right nor left.

It was only when he was far out among the fields that Sir Clement seemed able to draw breath again. And something of his panic left him. Despite the complacent bigotry of his words, the preacher had struck home. There was infinite truth in what he had said, Sir Clement dully repeated to himself. There was no escape for such as he. Ever and ever he would feel the tap of an unseen hand on his shoulder, bidding him come—where? Ah, that was it, anywhere, everywhere, but never away from himself. This business was entirely his own, neither with men nor even

with God. And harder than any other form of reprobation it was to be one's own accuser and judge. It was, given a man's nature, the most merciless tribunal of all.

Would it not, he asked himself, and not for the first time, have been better to have made a clean sweep of the whole bag of tricks? It could still be done. One thing only kept him back. He would never get his deserts. He was no Tom Wagstaff. He was Sir Clement Barradine, whose word would be readily taken, whose sin the world would only be too ready to condone. And acquittal or condemnation, it would not help him in the least. Though every court in the world acquitted, though every priest absolved, the blood of Will Dallas would remain red on his hands and cry to heaven.

No, he must wait for the retribution that would surely come from within. Something would betide to give him the chance of working out his ransom. And if it did not come to him of itself, he must go forth to seek it. But he was dimly conscious that already it was on its way, that some mysterious hand had already kindled the purifying, sacrificial flame through which he would win to the redemption of which the preacher had spoken. Whose hand—what flame?

He looked up and saw that he had nearly cannoned against a short squat figure, stamping along the road in stout boots, carrying an umbrella almost as tall as herself. The squat figure tore him from his thoughts. Some pleasurable contact, some associated fragrance there was to him in this prosaic woman, which laid itself on his spirit like balm. He lifted his hat and fell into stride with her.

"Have you been to church, Miss Witherspoon?"

"I have not." Her tone was not very gracious, but still what one may term negotiable. "I can't afford to go to

church more than once a week if I am to do God's work outside. If you have anything to do with the churchwardens, you might speak to them about the ventilation."

"No, the ventilation is not of the best," he said and he had his own good reason for saying so.

"That is the way to the Priory," she said, stopping at a crossroad to which they had just come.

"Thank you. But I'm not going there yet."

She stamped on with grimly pursed lips, and he saw that her tolerable affability before was due to the prospect of getting rid of him soon. Amusement and perversity combined to make him foil that prospect.

"Why do you hurry, Miss Witherspoon?" he asked, smiling. "You're not as busy now as you are at the school."

"I'm always busy," she replied sharply.

"Even when you do nothing?"

"I carry my work with me constantly."

"Is that quite fair to the work? There's such a thing as drawing back to leap better, as the French say."

"That's for me to judge," she snapped, a cold glitter in her steel-blue eyes.

"Certainly. I'm not saying it in a carping spirit. Would you mind telling me, Miss Witherspoon—why you dislike me?"

She looked up at him—she had a good way to look up—with a gesture of alarm.

"Or, if I may be allowed to put my question somewhat differently—whose dislike of me is greater, yours or Miss Middleton's?"

She seemed to have recovered her poise and walked on faster, almost as though she were running away from him. His expectant silence at last forced an answer from her.

"I can't speak for Miss Middleton, Sir Clement. But I'm sure we ought both to feel flattered by the question. Neither

Miss Middleton nor I were aware that you had noticed our existence."

"That's no answer. You're hedging."

"Oh, I can't help your fancies," she said impatiently.

"I should like to think I'm wrong," he said, still smiling. "But it really wasn't my fault that I came with Miss Clavering last week. I didn't bring her. She brought me."

"We neither of us care a snap of the fingers for Miss Clavering," she replied with heat. "We do our work and there the matter ends."

"So it should. But, pardon me, there's such a thing as constituted authority. Even the most honest work is subject to criticism by those in power."

"Of course, so you would say, being on the side of the big battalions. Well, Miss Clavering can criticize as much as she likes. And if she cares to do so in the presence of her friends—we don't grudge Miss Clavering her friendships."

"Then it isn't because of Miss Clavering," he said reflectively. "Is it, perhaps, because I'm not my cousin Jocelyn?"

"I really don't understand you, Sir Clement."

"People are used to Jocelyn. A good deal of sympathy may be felt for him in certain quarters. I may be considered an interloper."

"Your cousin, Sir Clement, is probably considered to possess more tact than you."

"Now it's I who am in the dark."

She was silent as if debating whether to answer him.

"Oh, it's no business of mine," she said with a wave of her hand.

"What isn't, pray?"

"Well, if you insist," she said, somewhat viciously,

"you've only been here a minute and already you've set the whole neighborhood by the ears."

He looked at her in genuine consternation.

"Goodness gracious, how did I manage to do that?"

"You're not throwing dust in my eyes. A deputation called on you the other day, didn't it?"

"It did."

"You were most rude to them, almost insulting. They offered you the highest mark of their respect, and you behaved to them like the—like the veriest hooligan. I was included among those on whose behalf they spoke, and so I am entitled to resent it."

"Why, what did I say to them?"

"You told them to mind their own business and not to interfere in yours. You have made dozens of enemies."

"If I have it's entirely my affair. You needn't worry about that," he said, quietly. "All the same, it depends very much on the source of your information."

"What does that matter?" she asked curtly.

"Not in the least, I admit. But I can't help garbled versions getting abroad."

"Of course they are garbled. I suppose you think me very impertinent."

"No—only misinformed."

He had stopped, and she too had come to halt, held by her curiosity—or was it a certain magnetism about him? He stood, looking down on her, a tower of massive manhood.

"I don't often go out of my way to nail a lie to the counter, Miss Witherspoon." His tone was stern and compelling. "But somehow I think you're worth it. Would you like to know what really happened?"

"I should," she said, reduced to a curious meekness.

"Certain people came to me with a proposal which would have deprived other people of their rights. I have a

horror of that. It was a case of vested interests pitted against the inarticulate masses. Contrary to what you said, I'm not on the side of the big battalions. Rather paradoxically for a man of my station, such as it is, I flouted the vested interests and took up the cause of the silent masses. I was determined that in this instance at least they should have a voice. If acceptable to them, I would be that voice. I cast my lot with the people, the workers and, by implication, with you. I presume you have no objection to being called a working woman, have you? So you see, you have no grievance against me. Garbled versions! People get so ungenerous under their disappointments."

"No, that isn't what I heard," she said in quite a small voice.

"But, of course, you're quite at liberty to choose between my word and that of your informant."

"I have chosen, Sir Clement," and she held out to him a quick hand.

"Thank you."

"Only will you please tell me why you so obstinately insist on putting yourself in a good light to me?"

"Because I know where and when to do so."

"A compliment?" And she shot him a look of almost coquettish sprightliness. "I'm afraid I'm going to make you a poor return for it. I feel compelled to tell you, Sir Clement, that you are a man utterly unfit for your —station, such as it is."

"I have not the least doubt of it, madam."

"You have many things to learn and to unlearn. In the first place you must practice the art of being a snob."

"Wasn't that among the seven labors of Hercules?"

"You should cultivate a condescending boorishness to me and people such as I. Take a leaf out of the book of

your late lamented uncle. He once, only once, invited me to lunch. When I came he sent in word that he was very busy but would be with me as soon as possible. I was meanwhile to get on with the lunch. So I solemnly ate my way through the five courses, the butler doing the honors, waited another half an hour, in vain, and departed. Now that was the real *grand seigneur.*"

"Yes, I'm afraid that's just the sort of thing Uncle Jacques was apt to do," laughed Sir Clement. "But probably he was busy with the gout."

"Let's hope it was gout. Such an imperial complaint."

"And when you come to lunch with me, Miss Witherspoon, I promise you a proper host." She looked at him in quick surprise, but made no answer. "I'm very much afraid I can't act up to your advice," he continued soberly. "I'm constitutionally incapable of snobbery. All the corpuscles of my blood are red, except those that are white, a crimson red—not a speck of blue in them. I'm a discredit to my ancestors. The law of heredity has a kink in it somewhere, as far as I am concerned."

"Sir Jacques would be horrified if he heard you," she said with rather a sober laugh.

"Those fossilized old Tories had their own rule of life," he went on, acknowledging her interruption with a friendly nod. "I have mine. Oh, yes, Miss Witherspoon, I have learned and unlearned many things in my time. Out there, you know, among the primeval forest-giants, under the immensity of tropical nights, you get to know the littleness of things human. The crash of empires, the world-racking wrestlings of great nations—what are they? Ephemeral squabbles. What are our puny imbroglios, our pettyfogging destinies? In the great silences you can hear the gods laugh."

He paused and passed his hand across his forehead.

She looked at him in amazement, not unmixed with a covert admiration. But something else rang from his words, a great pain, a hidden sorrow. His record held something that tinged his thoughts very dark. She would have pitied him, if she did not think that thereby she was shaming his manhood. In his eyes was a deep retrospective look.

"It's an old cry, hoarse with repetition and almost meaningless, that we all hark back to the same Adam. But, Miss Witherspoon, few have proved it as I. So you will see why my present position is nothing, less than nothing, to me. Almost an outrage on my feelings. I remember we were once marooned in a swamp, our transport sucked in by the quagmire. I learned then that the stomach is the greatest common denominator of all. Our whiteness of skin did not save us from starving one atom less than our pigmy carriers, those one remove from the ape. Those pinching days made me brother to them. And now that I am back here, in affluence and plenty, I don't see why I shouldn't be at least first cousin to those who need me. Miss Witherspoon, I want you to help me in that. You know the deserving poor better than I do, and you won't be deceived."

"Oh, I shall only be too glad!" she cried joyfully, about to put out her hand but refraining.

"Yes, we have already ratified our pact," he smiled, noting her gesture and understanding.

"How good it feels to hear a man like you preach such a gospel!" she said glowingly. And more . . ."

"Yes, and more?"

"And more to know that you can evangelize it in hard cash."

And with that she was gone. He looked after her, not without a certain sense of compunction. Had he quite played the game with this honest soul? He hoped so. He

hoped he had not been influenced too much in his efforts to put himself right with her, to get her good opinion, by the fact that she was colleague, friend and room-mate to the girl with the Madonna face who ignored his existence.

But their talk had brought him one good result. It had crystallized his intentions. He would set about it at once, to redress grievances, to wipe tears from the face of misery. Perhaps, in some small degree, it would be set down to him for atonement.

He would not have to stint himself. His interview with Mr. Mason, while he was in town, had shown him what astonishing means were at his disposal. And there was no one to question his motive. His secret was locked up safely in himself. It would never find a voice if he kept silent. He had effaced back traces, he had shed all pursuit. To that extent he had nothing to fear.

Some minutes later he was crossing the drawbridge. A man, lounging negligently against the balustrade, straightened himself up as he approached and, stepping in his way, touched the broad Panama well pulled down over his forehead. Sir Clement stopped dead.

"Sir Clement Barradine?" asked the stranger.

No sound came from Sir Clement.

"Formerly Derek Skene?"

Sir Clement stepped back, his eyes averted as from an apparition. There was a cracked, frozen ring in his voice as he asked, laboringly:

"Are you—Will Dallas?"

"I Will Dallas?" asked the other in an injured tone. "That I'm not. Poor Will's dead, as you know—none better. I'm his brother Charley. And I want a word with you."

"Come into the house," said Sir Clement, as he turned and led the way.

CHAPTER VIII

BLOOD-MONEY

SIR CLEMENT had some justification for asking his extraordinary question. At first blush there was more than a superficial resemblance in feature between the two brothers, though this did not extend to their figures, for Charley, thick-set and burly, recalled none of Will's slender elegance. But there was a striking difference of facial expression. In Charley's there was no trace of the derisive truculence of his brother, but rather a bland ingenuousness which, in a man of his varied and enterprising past, might easily be suspected of masking a crafty mind. And Sir Clement, numbed and dazed though he felt, was aware that he was face to face with a grim danger on his escape from which he had, so fatuously, just been congratulating himself.

The two men walked silently into the house, the newcomer moving in a sidling, rather snake-like manner, his footfall almost noiseless on the flagged corridor, bearing out the suggestion of hidden guile that emanated from his face. They entered the study and Charley looked round him admiringly.

"Snug little place, this, Derek, or Sir Clement, or whatever name you would like me to call you by. Not much price the loghouse after this, eh? No wonder you left it without saying good-by to any one. Not that there was any one to say good-by to," he added softly.

"How did you find me?" Sir Clement asked still in that dull numbed way of his.

"Oh, very simple—nothing wonderful about it at all. There was that paper you were always getting. Smee brought it again next week and in it was the photo of the missing heir as a boy. Will had told me your real name, but I had forgotten till I saw it again in the paper. You were 'a darned sight prettier then and you didn't have a beard, but I had no difficulty in recognizing you. So I just came on."

"What do you want?"

"Oh, I say, pard," said Charley, almost lachrymosely, "is that the way to put it to an old friend? Here I've come thousands of miles to see you and you don't even offer me a drink for sake's sake."

Without a word Sir Clement fetched out a decanter and glass and set them in front of him.

"Well, here's to your baronetship—health and prosperity!" said Charley, draining the glass and looking greedily at the decanter. Then for a moment or two he sat in silent thought. "Well, old man," he said at last, "it's that little affair about my brother."

"I presume so. Where is he buried?"

He did not know why he asked it. It was not for want of something to say. But it seemed that then already, thus early in the day, he had glimmerings of the strange design in the execution of which Kenneth was to be his instrument. The question, however, seemed something of a poser to Charley, who scratched his ear, as if rummaging in his memory.

"Hm, almost forgotten. But, you see, it's some time since and I'm not familiar with the neighborhood. But as best as I can say it's the clearing to the left-hand side of the gully. Yes, that's where he is. He's all right. Deep down—tucked away all nice and comfy. We put a

wooden cross over him: 'Killed,' with his name and the date. But we didn't say who killed him."

"I never killed your brother, Charley."

"No, no, of course not. Somebody just breathed very hard and blew that hole in his temple. Or maybe he put it there himself."

"Your brother died in fair fight, or as fair as I could make him make it. His hand was up to shoot me and . . ."

"Yes, I've got that revolver," nodded Charley.

"And as we closed, his head dashed violently against the corner of the table. I didn't hear it crack. I don't know why he should have died so quickly."

Sir Clement was white and his voice unsteady at the recollection of the terrible scene. Blind white eyes seemed to be staring at him from every corner of the room. The huddled form lay defiantly limp, refusing to become taut again. The twisted mouth grinned. Charley was ostentatiously passing the back of his hand across his eyes.

"You'll excuse my emotion, old chap," he said at last. "But this is the first authentic account I've had of my poor brother's last moments. So, according to your statement, it was just an accident."

"It was that, by God!"

"And you had no motive?"

"Motive?"

"For getting rid of him. I know the terms on which you took Will into partnership. Very generous terms, no doubt of that. Too generous, probably, as they appeared to you when you came to think it over. There was a quick way of getting out of that agreement. You took it."

For a moment Sir Clement's head spun. There was a horribly plausible ring about the words. In all his aspects of the case it had never occurred to him that that might

be the construction to be put upon it. He saw how deadly it was. He countered it, almost at random.

"In that case I should hardly have run away, should I?"

"Who knows? When you had finished the job, you probably got into a blue funk. Your neck was worth more to you than the whole share of the profits. Or else, why didn't you stay and face it out?"

Sir Clement nodded. He had no other answer to give. He could give one, but that involved a piece of psychology which Charley would never understand. At the same time he felt desperately that he was being driven into an awkward corner. He had allowed Charley, by his insidious ways, to maneuver him into a disadvantageous position from which he must try, by every means in his power, to make his escape. His attitude had been wrong all through. He would meet bluff with bluff.

"We'll cut all that nonsense, Charley. In the first place there isn't even any proof that your brother is dead. It's your word against mine."

Charley glanced at him as if doubting his ears. Then he leant over to Sir Clement with an impressively confidential air.

"Oho, is that the tack you're going on? Then you've made a mistake. I've ample proof and to spare."

"The niggers. They don't count."

"Not niggers. White men—Englishmen. You don't happen to know that George Higgins, the Scruncher and old Flipp were with me at the time. They had come with me as far as Gwylong, and I made 'em step off the train to look in on Will for a game of poker. We were all together when we found him."

"Oh, you were," said Sir Clement, rather aimlessly.

"Yes, and what's more I can lay my hands on 'em in a jiffy. George is flourishing as a bar-tender in Bulewayo,

the Scruncher keeps what he labels a manicuring establishment close by, and Flipp is doing a three years' stretch on the breakwater. I'm sure they wouldn't, any of 'em, mind a trip home at public expense, especially Flipp. Or, if necessary, their evidence could be taken on commission."

Sir Clement rose with a sudden violence that made his chair clatter to the floor.

"Oh, damn you, then. Lay your evidence. In fact, I shall lay it myself."

"God forbid!" cried Charley in alarm. "Whatever makes you think of such a thing? To put it bluntly—I don't want to kill the goose that's going to lay the golden eggs."

"So that's what you're after. Blood-money."

"Dear, dear, you put it crudely, old boy. But Will's loss means a lot to me. He was a good brother. He wouldn't have forgotten me when it came to sharing the profits that were never shared."

"How much do you want?" asked Sir Clement after a pause.

"Oh, say two hundred and fifty pounds to go on with."

"To go on with?" echoed Sir Clement with wrinkled brows.

"Yes, two fifty four times a year. That's letting you off cheap. Look what a hell of a lot you've still got left."

"It's a good deal, all the same."

"Not when you come to consider it's got to be divided among four."

Sir Clement uttered a fierce laugh.

"Very well, I'll give you the money. I'd give you a million, and steal it first, if it would bring Will back to life again. But don't think I'm doing it to buy your silence. You're free to speak any moment you please—unless I speak before. This isn't blackmail I'm paying you.

No, I rather like the idea of your trading in your brother's blood. Making a usury out of his rotting bones. Say I killed him, if you like. But this makes you an accessory after the fact. I've found an accomplice. That'll take the sting out of whatever guilt may be mine."

"Oh, come, old man," Charley bleated plaintively, "it'll make no difference to Will if I make a bit out of him."

"And now get out, you hound!"

And Charley, grabbing the check Sir Clement had dashed off as he was speaking, went precipitately. He had only gone a minute or two when Jocelyn entered. Sir Clement, striding up and down, did not notice him till he spoke.

"I say, Clem, that was a queer visitor you had."

"Somebody I knew out there," said Sir Clement curtly.

"He waylaid me outside and inquired for you. I asked him what he wanted, but he only smiled and looked wise." Jocelyn walked over to the table. "What, only one glass? Looks like a rather lop-sided reunion. Well, if that's the sort of company you kept out there, I'm not surprised you're inclined to fight shy of people. I hope he didn't come to bother you about anything."

"Jocelyn, I must ask you not to interfere in things that don't concern you," said Sir Clement sternly.

"All right, all right, don't get huffy, old boy," said Jocelyn in a hurt tone. "See you again when you're in a better temper."

Sir Clement looked after him with a frown. He did not so much mind the boy's inquisitiveness, amounting almost to rudeness, but it struck him that he could count on little loyalty from Jocelyn. He too belonged to that offensive outside crowd, the Hobhouses and those hidebound, hard-drinking reactionaries, of his meeting with whom some one had spread such a maliciously distorted version. Oh, how he longed to hurl his secret among

that smug company, if only for the joy of seeing them stampede in comic consternation.

And then a shadow seemed to fall over him suddenly. Oh, yes, he might still have his wish. His secret was no longer his own. Prying, malevolent eyes were dogging him everywhere. Charley Dallas, from his lurking-place close by, George Higgins, the so-called Scruncher, and Flipp across the water, Flipp, sweating at his penal task and straining eager eyes for the expected remittance to alleviate his evil lot. What a crew in whose keeping to know one's life, one's honor!

He stepped out on the balcony and his gaze wandered involuntarily in the direction of the schoolhouse, now a dim blurred blotch in the darkening distance. Yes, and from there too danger and distress seemed stalking down upon him, more sinister, perhaps, than all the others combined, because he could assign to it no place in his scheme of things.

CHAPTER IX

HAZEL'S STORY

HAZEL was hurrying, gayly humming a snatch of song, when she saw Kenneth Hobhouse coming towards her. He hailed her cheerily and stopped.

"Hullo, hullo, little girl, whither away in such great haste?"

She jerked her head evasively and gave him a long earnest look.

"I'm glad to see you looking so much better, Mr. Hobhouse. I passed you some time ago, but you didn't notice me, in fact, you didn't seem to be noticing anything. So I didn't stop you. There was such—such an expression on your face."

"What sort of an expression?"

"Oh, I should say—suicidal."

He looked sober for a moment, then he laughed and patted her hand in the paternal way he always adopted towards her.

"Oh, really? Well, I don't feel that way just now, not in the least. As far as I am concerned suicide need never have been invented."

"Then you'll soon be going back to London."

"London? Oh, no. I'm never going back there."

"But your business?"

"My business is here. Behold in me the Lord High Steward of the Barradine estates."

"What, have you been appointed steward?" she asked in quick surprise.



"Even so, with the best man in the world to serve under. What's the matter, aren't you pleased?"

"I'm ever so pleased, Mr. Hobhouse. But—but I was thinking of something else."

"Never think, fair maiden, and you'll never grow wrinkles. All the thought in the world isn't worth the tiniest pleat in that peach-bloom face of yours. But there, I must get along. Duty calls, mistress mine, duty. Salaam!"

Yes, this was a different Kenneth, and good cause he had to be different. He had come in for a jolly soft thing. She did not grudge him his good fortune, but it had a bitter sting for her. She walked on, but the spring was gone from her step and the song from her lips. She no longer hurried. Somehow there seemed no more the same urgency in her errand.

Even so, when she got to her destination, she found she had to wait. Jocelyn was fond of keeping her waiting. He liked to see the love-light leap up in her eyes at sight of him and the look of anxious expectancy change to the joy of fulfillment. But this time the lamp remained unlit and she did not come darting towards him.

"What's the matter, darling?" he asked with some uneasiness. Any day she might get to know of things he did not want her to know.

"Have you heard the news?" she counter-queried, a little bluntly.

"What news, dearest?"

"Ken Hobhouse has been made steward of the estate."

"But that's no news to me. I have known it for days. Anyway, I don't see what it has got to do with us."

"Isn't it abominable that you should be passed over like this for a stranger?" Tears of anger stood in her beautiful eyes.

"But, my dearest, don't ruffle yourself. I wasn't passed over. I was never in the running."

"That's it. He never even gave you a thought. Here was a chance of offering you an honorable, a splendid position, one that would have redeemed you from the indignity of being dependent on him and . . . oh, Jocelyn, dear, you're really not going to be content with keeping yourself on his allowance—why, I might almost have said pin-money," she added with a touch of scorn.

"Why not say right away that I ought to be wearing petticoats?" he asked sullenly.

"Oh, Jocelyn, dear, I didn't mean to be spiteful. I know that you have it in you to be all that a man should be. But if you can't get him to give you the money to go abroad, aren't you going to look out for something to do here?"

"You forget that I still feel rather sore," he said irritably. "When a fellow, who has been within an ace of touching fifty thousand a year, comes down to being a dependent, he can't expect to be all there again in a minute. It's unfortunate, to say the least."

"Yes, Jocelyn, but if it was his money, he had a right to claim it, didn't he? One must look facts in the face."

"That's the last straw. Take his part. I don't care."

"But I'm not taking his part. I'm taking yours, Jocelyn, dear. You must admit it's an impossible situation. It's all very well your living with him now, if you are willing to put up with it, two bachelors all on your own. But what's going to happen when it comes to"—she blushed adorably—"when it comes to our setting up house? Surely we can't all live together, even supposing he consented to it and I put my pride in my pocket. And then he might marry himself. Two families in the same house—a perfect caravanserai."

"Even so, with the best man in the world to serve under. What's the matter, aren't you pleased?"

"I'm ever so pleased, Mr. Hobhouse. But—but I was thinking of something else."

"Never think, fair maiden, and you'll never grow wrinkles. All the thought in the world isn't worth the tiniest pleat in that peach-bloom face of yours. But there, I must get along. Duty calls, mistress mine, duty. Salaam!"

Yes, this was a different Kenneth, and good cause he had to be different. He had come in for a jolly soft thing. She did not grudge him his good fortune, but it had a bitter sting for her. She walked on, but the spring was gone from her step and the song from her lips. She no longer hurried. Somehow there seemed no more the same urgency in her errand.

Even so, when she got to her destination, she found she had to wait. Jocelyn was fond of keeping her waiting. He liked to see the love-light leap up in her eyes at sight of him and the look of anxious expectancy change to the joy of fulfillment. But this time the lamp remained unlit and she did not come darting towards him.

"What's the matter, darling?" he asked with some uneasiness. Any day she might get to know of things he did not want her to know.

"Have you heard the news?" she counter-queried, a little bluntly.

"What news, dearest?"

"Ken Hobhouse has been made steward of the estate."

"But that's no news to me. I have known it for days. Anyway, I don't see what it has got to do with us."

"Isn't it abominable that you should be passed over like this for a stranger?" Tears of anger stood in her beautiful eyes.

her dwelling, she heard from the hall a voice scolding stridently within.

"Now, Gory, you must not get on the table. It isn't manners, really. There are quite enough other places in the room where you can make yourself comfortable. Oh, there, there, darling, did I make it unhappy? Come to my arms, sweetheart. Mum-um. Why should we quarrel? After all, you and I are the only two sensible people in the world, Gory, love."

To make no mystery of the matter, the party addressed by the sanguinolentous name was a majestic Angora cat which Miss Witherspoon would not have exchanged for all the menageries in the world.

"I think that last a most offensive remark, Tab," said Hazel, entering gayly.

Miss Witherspoon sat up and looked at her with a gasp.

"Why, what's the matter, Tab?" asked Hazel astonished.

"Nothing. I was only thinking how pretty you are, Hazel."

"Nonsense, Tab. Oh!"

The exclamation was a note of pain. A shadow had all at once clouded the Madonna face and she sat down, clasping and unclasping her hands. Two big tears trickled slowly from her eyelids.

"Well, I should be glad if I had nothing worse to cry about," said Miss Witherspoon with great asperity.

"Oh, Tab, I assure you, I'm not pretty. Salome, my little sister was," she said, gulping down her tears. "And, Tab, I've just reminded myself—it's the anniversary. It's eight years to-day that it all happened."

Miss Witherspoon was up and over in a moment, her arms tenderly but firmly enfolding the trembling form.

"There, there, my lamb. Just an innocent remark and to have such consequences. It only shows how careful

one has to be. Scold me, Hazel, dear, scold me hard."

Hazel was slowly drying her eyes.

"No, Tab, dear, it wasn't your fault at all. It would have come to me just the same, to-night, when I saw the date, writing up my diary. And then I should have gone on crying half the night and I should have been no good for school to-morrow. It feels easier, with you sitting next to me here."

And she twined her lithe hand into the stumpy fingers and pressed close to the comfortable sturdiness of the older woman. So they sat for a little while, and then Hazel looked up wanly.

"I've never really told you the whole story, have I, Tab?"

"No, and you're not going to."

"But I rather want to, Tab. Won't you let me?"

"I'd let you prick me with red-hot needles if it would do you any good, child."

Hazel kept silent for a moment or two, and then a calm brave look came into her eyes. Miss Witherspoon sat some distance away and became very busy with Gory.

"Father had gone away on business," Hazel began abruptly. "He was going to be away some days. That evening mother called Salome and me down. Oh, Tab, you can't imagine what a queenly creature she was. Beautiful as—as heaven. I was twelve then, Salome ten. She was terribly excited, mother was. She was very pale and a strange fire flickered in her eyes. She asked us—I remember how strained her voice sounded and how pitifully she tried to make it natural—she asked us whether we should like to travel. Of course, we were both delighted. Well, Uncle Tommy—that was Sir Thomas Thistlethwaite—would take us all away. He would take us to Venice and Cairo, anywhere we cared to go. No, father wasn't

coming with us. In fact, father mustn't know anything about it—not till we were away and then we would write and tell him how much we were enjoying ourselves."

"Yes, Hazel, I'm listening," said Miss Witherspoon, filling in the pause

"Mother drank two glasses of wine as she talked. Then she took something from a small bottle, and got very flushed. She talked wildly—I didn't understand her at all. But I felt there was tragedy in the air. Salome was dancing about like mad. She was always a little selfish and spoilt, but, poor child, I suppose she didn't guess as much as I did. I said I couldn't possibly go without asking daddy. Mother said, with a terrible laugh, that I was a fool and had better sleep it over. Oh, I didn't sleep much that night. I wanted to fly to father, to tell him that something dreadful was going to happen. But, oh, how was I to get to him? And in the morning . . ."

"Yes, in the morning?" Tabitha prompted her softly.

"In the morning mamma came down, looking—I hardly recognized her. And Salome was all ready too, dressed in her finest. 'Well, Hazel?' asked mother, looking at me —I shall never forget that look. 'Don't go, mamma, don't go!' I cried. 'I must, dear,' she whispered. 'Then I'll stay with daddy and wait for you, mamma. You'll come back, mamma, dear, won't you?' She did not answer, but caught me to her and kissed me with a kiss that has burnt on my lips ever since."

She was staring in front of her with unseeing eyes. Miss Witherspoon was gripping at Gory till he miaowed. She felt she had to do something, else she would burst into howls that would startle the night.

"And she never came back—never," Hazel went on with a tense quietness that was more poignant than the most

vocal despair. "I remember those lonely evenings with daddy, as we sat with our arms clasped tight round each other's neck. I could see he had received a deadly blow, however much he tried to hide the wound from me. He even laughed and joked—oh, such ghastly humor. He didn't want me to see that his life lay in ruins. But I knew. 'Oh, don't hate her, daddy,' I cried to him. 'I don't hate her,' he replied. 'I have no right to hate her. I know she never loved me, not when she married me, nor ever since. She said so to me many times. I am sorry to have to tell you this, but I want you to see that she has an excuse.' He was the noblest man that ever lived. 'Let us send for Salome,' I begged him. 'I miss her so much.' 'No, dearest,' he said, 'we mustn't be selfish. She may want Salome. She may need her for comfort if things don't go very well with her. You don't mind your mother having a little comfort, do you, Hazel?' He was calm and resigned. He knew he would not suffer long. He had his remedy waiting. And, oh, never a word from them ever since, never a word from them, wandering around, perhaps, there in outer darkness!"

"Hazel, dear, perhaps they are beyond reach of your longings," came softly from Tabitha. "Does it sound cruel to say so?"

"Oh, my dear God, I would give my own life to know that they were dead—both safely sheltered in their graves!"

The words came in a wail, and then she sat dumb, with tight-pressed lips, rigid as a figure of stone. Miss Witherspoon sprang to her feet and shook her.

"For God's sake, Hazel, cry!"

"I wish I could," came the weary answer. "I wish I could cry myself dead. But the ache is too deep for that. God must be very angry with me, for he has refused me

the gift of tears—at least as many as I want. And I want such a lot! Do you mind, Tabitha, if I say good night now?"

"Yes, I do, Hazel, very much," said Miss Witherspoon promptly. "You must wait till you're a little bit more fit company for yourself. Stay a while and talk."

"Yes, Tab, of course, if you wish me to."

"In fact, there's something I've been waiting an opportunity to tell you these last few days. Hazel, I've made a discovery."

"Oh? Anything important?"

"In a way, very important. Hazel, Sir Clement is a gentleman."

"Oh, is that all?" asked Hazel, with a little *moue* of disappointment.

"You don't seem very excited about it, but it made rather an impression on me. I won't trouble you with the story of how I came to make my discovery. But there it is. And knowing what I know, I was just a tiny shade vexed with you."

"Vexed with me, Tabitha?" cried Hazel, catching at the other's hand in alarm.

"Forgive me, dear. But the blame is entirely on me for not having told you before. I was sorry to see you treat him so coldly when he came to-day with that unspeakable Miss Clavering to make arrangements for the school bazaar. I won't say you were rude to him, but you might have been a little more cordial when he paid you the compliment of asking your coöperation."

"He might have known that I can do very little. And besides, Tab, dear, you know that I have small cause to be grateful to him."

"Oh, yes, of course, about Jocelyn."

"And I don't see how it makes him a gentleman because he's willing to open a bazaar."

"Certainly not," laughed Tabitha, glad to catch at something to break the tension which still strained the atmosphere of the room. "But I will give you one reason for my categoric statement. Do you remember the deputation?" Hazel nodded vaguely. "Well, Sir Clement gave me an account of the incident and his motives for refusing which are very creditable to him and don't tally at all with Jocelyn's version."

Hazel was about to make a hasty remark, then waited for Tabitha to proceed.

"A little diplomacy, my dear, can't hurt. Wouldn't it be wise of you to make a friend of Sir Clement?"

"I don't see the object," Hazel said coldly.

"It might come in useful. One of these days you may want to ask him a favor. It occurs to me that just as Jocelyn did not quite get the hang of that deputation, he might not have caught the drift of Sir Clement's view of the Canada business."

"Do you imply that Jocelyn is a fool or a liar, or both?" Hazel flared up.

"Hazel, why should I want to undermine your trust in Jocelyn? Perish the thought! Trust is such a beautiful thing. I only mean that when it comes to telling Sir Clement about yourself and Jocelyn, as he will have to be told eventually, you could perhaps do it better than Jocelyn. So why not get on a proper footing with him at once?"

"I—I shall never ask Sir Clement for anything."

But Miss Witherspoon noted Hazel's hesitation and it decided her to press the point.

"For instance, my dear, an excellent opportunity offers in this coming election. I hear he's the official Labor candi-

date And the poor man is quarantined by the snobs. Now wouldn't it be a nice thing if we asked Sir Clement whether he can do with any help from us, for canvassing or clerical work?"

"Yes, very nice, I'm sure. And what'll the Governors say?"

"They'll rave. Ah, Hazel, but this is just the opportunity my soul has been thirsting for. I want to show these amiable folk that we're not slaves. Our working time is theirs, but our leisure is our own."

"Oh, Tab, you know I'm not a fighter," said Hazel in a tired voice.

"Doesn't matter. I've got enough fight in me for the two of us. What say you?"

"Please, Tab, leave me out of it."

"Then I can't do anything either," said Tabitha with decision. "It would make your holding back stand out so much more glaringly."

"Oh, then do as you please."

"That's better. I'll approach Sir Clement to-morrow," Tabitha said busily. "He may not even want to have anything to do with us," she added with a sly look at Hazel. And then she uttered a cry of dismay. "Goodness me, child, do you know what the time is? Past twelve o'clock."

"It must be. I feel it in my bones. I really must go up now, Tab, dear."

"And you're sure you're quite all right, lambkin?"

"Oh, quite." The heavy eyes looked very pathetic. "My Calvary is over—for another year. Good night, Tab."

"Good night, dear. Happy dreams."

Miss Witherspoon, despite the lateness of the hour, did not follow her immediately. She was shocked beyond words by the glimpse she had been given into that martyred young heart. "Over for another year"—the would-be re-

assuring words did not deceive her. She knew that ache was lurking there all the time. It did not wait for stated periods. She quivered from head to toe with sympathy for that pent-up despair. Was there nothing she could do?

Almost instinctively her thoughts veered back to Sir Clement. She would have to see him about the election. And at the same time she might see him about other things. An idea had come to her that almost turned her cold with its daring. She braced herself to the possibility of a rebuff. Oh, yes, there might be a rebuff. But if so, it would stultify all the vaunted knowledge of human nature she had acquired by toilful years of observation. She would never again trust her ability to read a man's thoughts written on his face. And there was something she had seen in Sir Clement's face, during his two or three visits to the school, which was rather less difficult to decipher than a cuneiform inscription.

And she pondered her idea, looking round now and again, as if afraid some listener might overhear her thoughts. Then she caught up the somnolent Angora and pressed him tightly to her breast.

"Yes, Gory, it shall be done. But, mind you, it's to be a secret between you and me. We understand each other."

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CHAPTER X

WILY MISS WITHERSPOON

SIR CLEMENT was fairly launched on his campaign. He began to see something providential in this General Election which was upon the country and into which he had been pitchforked, as it were, almost immediately on his arrival. Here was at any rate a distraction for his mind, apart from the call he felt in himself to be up and doing, in the cause he had so much at heart.

His fighting blood was roused. In his boyhood he had loved obstacle races. Later on hard propositions had always evoked in him his latent tenacity of purpose and the will to prevail. The solid phalanx of opposition he saw arrayed against him did not make him quail for a moment. He set his teeth and smiled grimly when he heard who his opponent was. Lord Wilmington, the Marquis' son, was a keen sportsman, a fine cricketer, a master of hounds and a member of the great brewing firm which exercised a dominating control over all the "tied" houses in the county. He was also a large shareholder in the *Advertiser*. A formidable antagonist indeed.

The issue was quite in the lap of the gods. Sir Clement's offer had, of course, been received with enthusiasm by the party. The official Labor nominee had been at once withdrawn. But the party was poorly organized—the fighting of the seat had, in fact, been a mere after-thought. Labor had not hoped to do anything more than to make a small initial breach in the wall, through which, after a number

of further attempts, it might eventually reach the citadel.

Sir Clement's appearance had naturally enhanced its chances considerably. The prestige of the name was great. But the question was whether the people really understood. Squire and parson still held sway. It was doubtful whether the masses, broken by the bondage of centuries, still had the energy or the desire to strike a blow for themselves. Their bucolic intelligence still made them averse from any change. It was a rotten world, to be sure, but who could tell whether these new-fangled ideas would not make it a "worssen"?

Sir Clement was in his study, perpending the point, trying to bring method and order into the chaos of the party organization, when Miss Witherspoon was announced. He rose and met her with a smile of welcome.

"I am pleased to see you, Miss Witherspoon—even though you have come after lunch. By the way, when are you going to lunch with me?"

"When you ask me, Sir Clement. Although I think we had better let it stand over for the present."

"Just as you please. When you feel sufficiently well-disposed towards me to eat my salt, let me know. Now what's the trouble?"

"Only such as you have made yourself," she laughed.

"I—for whom?"

"For the other side. And I want to help you to give them more."

And in a few brief words she told him of the resolution at which she had arrived the night before.

"But this is excellent, Miss Witherspoon!" he exclaimed joyfully. "I should never have dreamt of suggesting it myself. It might be said that I was taking advantage of my being Chairman of the school and all that."

"That's true," she remarked soberly.

"But this is different. I want all the voluntary help I can get, Miss Witherspoon. Paid help, of course, I could get more than I need. But I surmise that, should I be successful, the other side will scrutinize my expense sheet most jealously."

"And I don't come alone, Sir Clement. I am bringing another recruit."

"More and more excellent still. Who is it?"

"Hazel—I mean, Miss Middleton."

He flattered himself that he had successfully weathered the shock. Miss Middleton to help? He was not at all sure that he wanted Miss Middleton's help. He had never expected it—from her attitude to him it was the last thing in the world he had expected. What did it mean—a gift of the Greeks, a shirt of Nessus?

It would forge a link between them. He would be brought into frequent, or rather, more frequent, contact with her—and what effect would that have on his peace of mind? Reduced to its elements, it came to this: the girl was a danger to him. He had even begun to glimpse vaguely the nature and essence of that danger.

And then sharply he brushed aside the warning hand he saw held up in mid-air. He had not yet come so far as to see ghosts by daylight.

He had busied himself at the table to tide over the suspicious pause.

"I'm sure Miss Middleton will be a tower of strength," he said, turning back to Miss Witherspoon.

"It will be doing her a favor," said Miss Witherspoon, looking away from him. "It will be a new interest for her. The poor child has things to forget."

"I know her sad story," nodded Sir Clement.

"Do you? In that case I can come to the point at once. I want you to do Miss Middleton a service. You see how

greedy I am—asking payment in advance. Of course, she doesn't know I'm asking you."

"What service can I do Miss Middleton?" he demanded rather stiffly.

"She's eating her heart out with anxiety for her mother and sister. She hasn't had news of them since they went away. Oh, it must be terrible not to know whether your dear ones are alive or dead. Do you think it possible to trace their whereabouts?"

"I should think it quite possible."

"Would it be encroaching too much on your kindness, Sir Clement, to take the matter in hand?"

"Not at all, Miss Witherspoon. I shall only be too delighted to do all I can. But you must give me a little time."

"Oh, certainly. I know how full you have your hands just now. And the poor thing has waited for eight years. A little while longer won't make much difference."

"Miss Witherspoon, will you please give me all the particulars?"

He took down notes of what she told him with an attention to detail which astonished her. She finally rose to go.

"But, of course, Sir Clement, not a word of this to Hazel. It will be time enough to tell her if you have any success. Otherwise the disappointment would only mean more heartache for her."

"You can rely on my discretion. By the way, Miss Witherspoon, my inaugural meeting is in Dunheaton tonight. All my helpers will be there and my agent will parcel out the work. Perhaps it would be as well if you and Miss Middleton could manage to come."

"We'll come with pleasure, Sir Clement."

"I'll call for you in the car at seven."

"Oh, that's awfully kind of you."

As soon as he was alone again he uttered a grim laugh.

He had felt it advisable to keep out of Miss Middleton's way. He had hesitated about availing himself of her help. And here he was saddled with a confidential mission on her behalf which, if successful, would put her under an eternal obligation to him. But, of course, she need never know. He must exact a counter-pledge from Miss Witherspoon to that effect. Only, in heaven's name, where was it all leading to?

He looked up with a frown as Jocelyn came storming in.

"Look here, Clem," the latter said angrily, "are you really going on with this tomfoolery?"

"What tomfoolery, Joss?"

"This blessed meeting to-night, for one. Surely you don't mean to go on identifying yourself with that tagrag-and-bobtail crew. It's not too late. If you'll come back to us, we'll receive you with open arms. Wilmington is ready to withdraw in your favor. I've come to tell you so as their ambassador."

"They couldn't have chosen a more astute diplomat."

"At the same time I want to get in a blow for the dignity of the family."

"You're a splendid champion, Joss."

"All right. Sneer away. I know you think small beer of me. But you'll see. Even a gnat may sting. I may still one of these days queer your pitch for you."

"I wouldn't really adopt that tone, Joss."

"Oh, yes, now you may bully," said Jocelyn, still trying to ride the high horse, but audibly singing a little smaller. "Perhaps you'll kick me out of the house."

"You need not fear that, Joss. I never go back on my word."

With a sulky air, but much more subdued than he had come in, Jocelyn left.

"Schoolboy's temper," Sir Clement smiled to himself.

But the brief interlude had left an unpleasant ring in his ears. He had already gathered suspicions of Jocelyn's loyalty. Now he had turned against him in open rebellion. He was left to plow a very lonely furrow. Oh, he need not fear. Smiling faces in plenty would yet beam on him, but it would be a sycophantic smile, skin-deep. He wondered if he would ever become as discredited in the eyes of the world as he was in his own.

Was it his fault that he was getting so much in the habit of reading between the lines? Was he unwarrantedly becoming suspicious of men and things and did he see the curse of Ishmael working even where goodwill held out to him a friendly hand? Was that why he was afraid of Hazel? He fastened on Jocelyn's threat. "Queer your pitch?" The slang phrase was no doubt flung out at random, but it echoed in his mind with an ominous reverberation.

He got to work again, and the sluices he opened swept away fancies and after-thoughts in a tumultuous rush. He sat up with a start when the servant called him to an early evening meal. But before he left his study he wrote a letter to a prominent London Detective Agency.

At seven o'clock to the minute, the car drew up outside the two-storied, ivy-clad cottage. He had an idea, nay, it was perhaps even a wish, that Miss Middleton would not come. But as he knocked at the door, she opened it, dressed in outdoor attire.

"Miss Witherspoon will be down presently," she said, acknowledging his greeting with a stiff little bow.

Miss Witherspoon had spent a frantic hour over a suitable get-up. Hazel had chaffed her on her anxiety to look charming. Tabitha was evidently setting her cap at Sir Clement. At that Tabitha had become very wroth and retorted that what was not good enough for other people was

certainly not good enough for her. Also that she was not a perky young thing, who couldn't help looking criminally attractive in anything she wore or didn't wear, but an old frump who, unless she exercised exceeding discretion, might be mistaken for a guy who had lost his way out of the Fifth of November.

Sir Clement and Hazel were chatting in the tiny sitting-room for a minute or two, when she intercepted a furtive look of his at the mantel-shelf clock. With a murmured "Excuse me" she went out into the hall to the foot of the miniature staircase and called:

"Tab, dear, Sir Clement is waiting."

The answer came in an unearthly yell that made her heart stand still. The next moment she was bounding fleetly upstairs. As she entered the room, she saw Miss Witherspoon sitting on the floor next to an overturned chair, her left leg drawn up under her and a look of agony on her face.

"Tab, dear, for heaven's sake, what have you done to yourself?" gasped Hazel, pale to the lips.

"Broken my leg—or perhaps only twisted my ankle," moaned Miss Witherspoon. "I stood on a chair to reach down my boa and it tipped over. Oh, dear, what a nuisance it is to be short and clumsy!"

"Can I do anything?" came Sir Clement's anxious voice from below.

"For goodness' sake, don't let him come in!" Miss Witherspoon whispered frantically. "I can't let him see me in this ridiculous attitude. Help me to the couch, Hazel, dear."

And presently Hazel was kneeling next to her, unlacing her boot.

"I really don't see anything, Tab, dear," she said, peering with solicitous eyes.

"Of course you can't see how it hurts," groaned poor

Miss Witherspoon. "Quick—the Elliman's on the shelf—before it swells."

Hazel rubbed vigorously, wiped her hands and proceeded to take off her hat.

"What on earth are you doing, child?" Miss Witherspoon asked sharply.

"Well, you can't go, Tab, dear . . ."

"That's a certainty. I couldn't walk an inch. But you can."

"What, all by myself?" cried Hazel, aghast.

"Why not? He's not a cannibal, and I dare say he's had his dinner."

"I'm not going, Tab," said Hazel firmly.

"Not without me? Very well, then I'll go too and ask Sir Clement to be so kind as to carry me on his back."

"Don't be so absurd, Tab."

"It's you who's absurd. Now then run along. You said the man was in a hurry."

And Hazel, knowing the impossibility of arguing Miss Witherspoon out of anything she had set her mind on, went in misery and dread, having seen her friend comfortably bestowed on the couch, with plenty of books and knitting to hand. Sir Clement met her downstairs and followed her out, murmuring words of inquiry and sympathy as he helped her into her seat.

But Miss Witherspoon, as soon as she heard the car heave itself up outside, sprang up and, with an agility that betokened a miraculous cure, hurried to the window. From there she watched the fast-disappearing car with a grim smile. Then she turned to Gory, who had ambled in to see what it was all about, and snatched him up in her arms.

"I think we managed that very well, old chap, didn't we? But mum's the word—as usual!"

CHAPTER XI

THE GREATEST ADVENTURE OF ALL

THE wheeled leviathan swished on gloriously. The resilient tires prevented oscillation and the car seemed to stand still when it was moving its fastest. Little was said between the occupants after the mishap to Miss Witherspoon had been adequately discussed. Hazel's eyes dwelt pleasurably on the green panorama of the countryside, still visible in the gathering twilight, as by its shifting views it dissolved itself into a kaleidoscopic mirage. Sir Clement glimpsed her sideways, taking in the perfect profile, wondering if the call of the world had ever come to one who seemed to sit so far above it in the serenity of Olympian heights.

"I hope you don't feel tired, Miss Middleton," he said at last.

"Not in the least, Sir Clement."

"Because you are so silent," he explained.

"Oh, that's only out of consideration for you. You are making a speech to-night, aren't you?"

"Well, and suppose?"

"You have to prepare, haven't you?"

He made a negligent gesture.

"What I have to say needs no preparation. It will come better impromptu. I have my points."

But having once caught her attention, he was loth to let it go. He refrained from again striking the personal note which, as he had already noticed before, she seemed to dislike. And so, with little prompting from her, he went on in an almost soliloquizing strain, alluding to the various places they passed, items of local history, all which came

back fresh to his mind on seeing them again after many years. She listened, at last, with interest. Some of the things he told her she did not know, others, with which she was more familiar, he clothed in an aspect new to her. She found herself, almost with a feeling of dismay, enjoying the ride.

He seemed to her very impersonal in this close and unexpected proximity between them. She could hardly credit him with being Sir Clement, the man whom she owed an unspoken grudge. He was to her, as it were, a stranger, whose acquaintance she was making *da capo,* with no preconceptions and no prejudices. For the time being she had called a truce. Later on she would feel herself at liberty again to hate him as much as she pleased. She looked forward to it with a vindictiveness of which she felt a little ashamed. There was in him such a total lack of consciousness that he had given her a grievance. If he knew of her interest in the matter, would he apologize, make amends? Somehow she was coming round to Tabitha's conclusion that, whatever else he might not be, he was a gentleman.

And then a thought struck her that filled her with apprehension and amusement. What would Jocelyn think of it? She had had no chance of informing him of this new development. As a matter of fact, Jocelyn was in London, carrying out his promise to her—as she thought. Would he approve of the new connection? Of course he would, especially when he knew the motive underlying it. He would be pleased, touched at this fresh token of her solicitude for his welfare, one she had given at the cost of great violence to her feelings. She was almost sorry that the violence to her feelings was not quite as great as she could have wished it to be. But then she was not with Sir Clement, but with a stranger masquerading as such.

The lonely byways had become populous, and presently

they ran into the noisy little town. It was obviously stirring with suppressed excitement. Groups of men stood everywhere. In the market-place, where they alighted, Sir Clement was recognized and a cheer was raised. Gripping Hazel by the elbow, he hurried quickly into the town hall. It was already almost full. An enthusiastic demonstration greeted him as he stepped on to the platform. But before he acknowledged it, he saw that Hazel had a comfortable seat and a good view a row or two behind him on the dais. She thrilled at the scene. The bustle, the sense of action, was in such contrast to the cloistral seclusion of her life. She seemed to hear the mill-wheels of the world go round with an invigorating rattle.

The Chairman spoke, several people followed him, and then came Sir Clement. The order had been somewhat reversed at his own request. He had said jokingly that the people ought to have a chance of taking his measure before he addressed them.

In clear precise words he stated his policy. Then came a fierce denunciation of the evil system of which for long years they had been the unwilling, or rather, unconscious victims. The country was a hospital, the people patients suffering from the political and economic diseases of the day. There were many quacks, prescribing fake remedies. But in many of the wards honest scalpels were already at work. He hoped they would send him to join the group of qualified physicians.

And finally he referred in scathing terms to his antagonist. Here was one who came to them under false pretenses, seeking his own aggrandizement at their expense. Horse-racing did not mean happiness, cricket was no cure for crowded tenements and a starvation rate of wages. And a candidate, who thought he could swim into port on a tide of beer . . .

Here he was interrupted by a storm of laughter and applause amid which, cutting short his peroration, he sat down, calm and unruffled as though he had been taking a solitary walk in a quiet wood. Strange thoughts, as she listened to him fascinated, were chasing each other through Hazel's brain. If Tabitha had discovered—she had not fully specified how—that Sir Clement was a gentleman, she herself had made the additional discovery that he was a man. She had not forgotten her antipathy, to which she had reserved for herself the right of giving vent when she chose, but she was no longer so fully convinced of the justice of it, no, not even of its justification. She felt herself saddled with a problem which she would have to study at her leisure.

Several times he had glanced round towards her solicitously, for the atmosphere of the hall had become thick, mingling the blends of many tobaccos, and she had nodded back at him reassuringly. She was sorry when the meeting came to an end and the great gathering began to stream out. Smilingly Sir Clement grasped innumerable grimy hands, uttering many a quick retort that brought a grin to his listeners' jowls. And then he went to where she stood waiting for him, a strangely questioning look in his eyes. It almost seemed as if he was seeking her approval, and she gave it to him in a silent commendatory nod. She saw that the occasion had taken its toll of him. He looked haggard and there was a curious stoop in his stalwart shoulders, almost as if he had taken on himself a load he found hard to carry.

With infinite care he piloted her out. As they stood ready to enter the car, an old man pushed up to them through the crowd and croaked hoarsely:

"Good luck to you, sir, and your young lady—God bless that sweet face of hers."

"Drive on," said Sir Clement brusquely to the chauffeur, quickly seating himself and Hazel in the car. Unfortunately his sense of humor did not come to the rescue. Or did he think that the situation did not lend itself to humorous treatment?

"Very annoying, the misunderstanding," he said in a constrained tone, "but it can't be helped."

"Of course it can't be helped. Don't be angry with the poor man."

There was a charming naïveté in her words, a lack of all mawkishness. She excused the man readily—the idea of the thing was beyond all the bounds of probability. And he writhed at the thought. She turned to him glowingly.

"What a wonderful meeting, Sir Clement! I'm sure that nobody who heard you can help voting for you."

He shook his head dubiously.

"Unfortunately they can't all hear me. It's a very large constituency. To get at them all I should have to address forty or fifty meetings, a physical impossibility. You see, they have to be won round to their own cause."

"If you don't believe in your battle, it's no good fighting," she said severely.

"I believe in the righteousness thereof, but not in the result. And right is not always might. The other side has the start of me. They have already the clear field, and I still have to jump the five-barred gate."

"Then jump, Sir Clement, and jump well!"

She was caught in the eddy of her enthusiasm, and she felt as she would feel in a cause of her own. She looked at the stern haggard man opposite her and she seemed to see him for the first time. But it was because she saw him with her own eyes and not through the reflection of others.

He made no answer and silence threatened to descend on

them again. They were rushing through a land of magic enchantment. The rich moonlight silvered the glades almost into the brightness of day, pricking out every blade of grass, making every field-flower stand out with startling distinctness. A warm westerly wind blew in through the open windows, fanning their faces with a loving breath. The flush of the heated room was still in her cheeks, tempered down by the gracious breeze to the warm glow of a young rose. His heart was beating fast. He fought hard against the feeling of what this girl meant for him. He wanted to think that the matter was still in abeyance. But he knew that at some time or other, and perhaps at no distant date, the revelation was awaiting him.

"You must feel cramped after sitting all that long while, Miss Middleton," he said suddenly. "Shall we get out and walk a little?"

"Oh, yes," she said with an eager little gesture.

They pulled up and got out. The car purred on lazily in front of them.

"Are you happy at the school?" he asked her presently.

"Yes, very," she replied with conviction.

"Despite all the botherings?"

"I never take them to heart."

"Your manner shows that. I have had serious complaints of your—insubordination," he laughed.

"There is one master above all other masters, and his name is duty. He who gives of the best can only serve the best."

"I have never heard it put better. No wonder that with such an ideal in front of you you are invulnerable to pin-pricks. Tell me, Miss Middleton, have you studied much?"

"Yes, quite a lot," she replied unaffectedly.

He asked her where, and she mentioned the name of a

first-class training college and went on to speak, without any show of mock-modesty, of her various qualifications. He listened in astonishment.

"But surely, Miss Middleton, with all that to your credit, you must want a wider field for your activities." And then he continued, waiting for her reply with a deep anxiety: "You won't be content to stay at Woodlands forever, will you?"

"Oh, I don't want to leave Woodlands," she said quickly.

"No? What's the attraction—Miss Clavering?"

But she did not smile.

"It's my home county. And—and there's Miss Witherspoon."

It came to him in a flash. She was prevaricating. That momentary hesitation had betrayed her. She had not given him the true reason. Was it indeed possible that this glorious creature, shrinking wayside flower though she was, should not have attracted some man's fancy, gained—and given back—his love? He had a sinking feeling, as though an abyss had opened before him.

And yet, who? She was not engaged or else Miss Clavering would certainly have mentioned the fact. Or if there were some one who owned the privilege of working for her welfare, her happiness, why had Miss Witherspoon, who surely must know, come with her confidential errand to himself, a stranger? No, he must be wrong. And he took heart of grace again. He looked at her and saw her face suffused with a dreamy joy.

"You are pleased about something, Miss Middleton."

"Am I? I don't know. Unless it's the moonlight. It—it intoxicates me. On nights like these I used to jump on my pony and run riot—when I was a little girl," she added with a sigh.

"Centuries ago."

"Well, no, it doesn't seem so long ago since I put my hair up," she said demurely.

"Since when you have been aging rapidly."

She shot out her hands in a sort of ecstasy.

"Look, doesn't the world seem just a big playground?"

"Except for those too old to play in it."

"That's their own fault," she said severely. "I shall age but I shall never grow old."

"Miss Middleton," he said suddenly, "would you again like to have a pony?"

"Oh, no, no," she said in horrified remonstrance. And then she added, laughing: "What would Miss Clavering say?"

"Yes, quite so." And then he paused, for he was going to say a great thing. "Then if not a pony, may I offer you another gift, one not so valuable and not quite so conspicuous?" And replying to her unvoiced question, he went on: "My friendship, Miss Middleton."

"Yes, I think I should like that," she said slowly, pensively. And then, as though to make up for her seeming ungraciousness, she exclaimed: "Thank you, Sir Clement."

"Don't thank me. The favor is on your side."

She looked at him, a little startled by his words. She was glad of his offer—it consummated Tabitha's suggestion by a short cut and made circuitous methods unnecessary. Her honest nature recoiled from such methods. They implied trickery, hypocrisy. He was a man who, at any rate, deserved straight dealing. But she thought of the possibilities. She would be able to help Jocelyn. She would, perhaps, be able to achieve what he had not achieved himself. It was something to win Jocelyn's gratitude.

But all the while her alarm kept alive in her. She was not quite so willing to surrender her distrust in this new

Sir Clement whom to-night she had seen for the first time. There had been something in his reply that had vibrated with a sense of mystery. What favor was she doing him? Why did he speak to her in words that held a hidden meaning? She knew what she knew and could not help looking on him as a man with two faces. She suddenly felt chilled with the chill of a new fear. A cloud was passing over the moon. The same cloud seemed passing over her heart. What was this new element that had come into her life? She bent down and tore up a marigold. Oh, if she could but as easily tear the veil from the face of the future!

"Isn't it getting rather late?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, yes," he took her up at once. "We'll get back into the car and make for home."

They found nothing more to say. Sir Clement thought that for one night he had said enough—perhaps more than he should have said. They reached the ivy-clad cottage some ten minutes later. On the doorstep she held out her hand.

"This night will be a land-mark to me," she smiled.

"The starting-point, I hope, into pleasant places," he replied, as his fingers closed over hers.

With a hasty good night she withdrew her hand and disappeared inside. For a moment he stood as if rooted to the spot. It was the first time that she had, voluntarily, touched him. And with that touch the great revelation had come.

She sped upstairs quickly to find Miss Witherspoon bustling about the room.

"Why, Tab, you walk as well as ever!" she cried in surprise.

"Did you want me to remain a cripple all my life?" snapped Miss Witherspoon. "I must have ricked a bone

and it got back into place again. Well, so you see he didn't eat you."

With eager words Hazel gave her an account of the evening.

"So you had a rattling good time and I had to chase you out with a broomstick," said Tabitha scornfully.

"But, oh, Tab," Hazel concluded rather lamely, "he doesn't think he'll get in."

"Then we must work all the harder."

"And, Tab, dear, your idea has come off," said Hazel more slowly. "He wants to be friends with me."

"My idea? I don't remember saying anything about it."

"Oh, Tab, you did! Only last night."

"Well, it doesn't interest me at all," said Miss Witherspoon with a cavernous yawn. "Are you ever going to bed to-night?"

Sir Clement had dismissed the car and went on foot. Even in the spacious tonneau he would have felt cribbed and cabined. An exultation was upon him that made him feel he could lead a storming party against the bastions of the sky.

What a strange thing this was that had come upon him! He had only known her a matter of weeks, hardly long enough, in the ordinary course of events, for the mere fact of her existence to filter through into his consciousness. And now he loved her!

He looked back on his later years and saw them clean and spotless, unsmirched by such lurid blots as mark the lives of most men. Yes, he had lived cleanly, but coldly and without emotion. But meanwhile all that unused tinder had been accumulating until, struck by a single spark, it had flared up into a great blaze. His soul came and sat by that blaze, warming itself. No misgiving assailed him, no tremor of fear at the vague apprehensions he had

always coupled with this girl. For the moment he had become a god, and that was good enough for any man. He had found love, and in finding it had lost his mortal self.

It did not occur to him that love, as a one-sided arrangement, might be a very unpleasant affair. He had had no experience of such. Flossie—how he squirmed at the recollection as at an act of sacrilege—had given him all he had asked and would have given more. He was well aware that, as yet, he had probably played a very small part in Hazel's life, in Hazel's thoughts. All that concerned him at present was to know that his emotions were not effete, that he was still capable of this, the greatest adventure of all

CHAPTER XII

A LESSON IN SOCIOLOGY

HAZEL was standing with tear-stained face, but flashing eyes, while Jocelyn was savagely decapitating all the ferns his cane could reach. Then, having wrought as much havoc as he could within his limit, he spoke again:

"It's monstrous—perfectly monstrous! I won't say a word about your going, the moment my back is turned, gallivanting with a man whom you profess to abominate. I won't do him the honor of being jealous. But to sit for a whole evening on a platform, to be gaped at by a gang of panhandlers and hooligans—well, I never! It's flying in the face of all convention."

"Well, suppose?" she retorted, her head lifted high. "What has convention ever done for me? And besides, they weren't hooligans."

"Oh, I'm glad you found your level."

"Their level is quite as high as yours."

"I'm not going to bandy words on such an unsavory subject," he remarked with dignity. "What concerns my cousin, I need not say anything about. I spoke to him pretty freely on the matter yesterday, and I thought I had made him see the error of his ways. He almost as good as promised to wash his hands of the whole affair. Of course, I need not be surprised at his breaking his word. But you—in heaven's name, what have you to do with this rotten business?"

"Just enough to suit me."

"But rather more than suits me. Hazel, I want you to

give me your word here and now that you will have nothing more to do with Sir Clement."

"I can't, Jocelyn. I must."

"Must what?"

"Keep in touch with Sir Clement."

"What on earth for?"

"I have my own ends in view."

"Which, of course, don't concern me. Grinding your own ax and leaving me in the cold. Call that playing the game? Hazel, I don't know whether I can any longer trust you."

She kept silent, wounded to the quick, chagrined beyond expression Was that how he repaid her loyalty, her anxious striving for his success? Seeing duplicity in her whole-hearted endeavor, treachery in her well-meaning moves. No, she would not justify herself. Pride sealed her lips, would seal them till he had again shown himself more worthy of her confidence.

Her silence alarmed him. He tried a change of tone.

"As a matter of fact, Hazel," he said more gently, "I don't care a jot whether you help Sir Clement or not. All the helping in the world won't help him. He's bound to be licked. But what I can't stand is this odium you are bringing on yourself. Miss Clavering sent for Miss Witherspoon to-day and asked her, as head-mistress, to forbid you to devote your leisure to such unladylike pursuits. To her surprise Miss Witherspoon answered that you had her entire approval and that she herself, in fact, was going to do some canvassing for Sir Clement. It almost looks like a conspiracy."

"Well, what of that?" she asked him coldly.

"And now I have to stand by, listening to all sorts of ill-natured things being said about you and I can't open my mouth to take your part."

"Why can't you, Jocelyn?" she asked him quietly.

"Oh, that brings the whole question up again," he cried irritably. "I thought we had agreed to let the matter rest for the present."

"As far as I am concerned it can rest for all time," said Hazel, turning to go.

She was already some distance before he recovered from his amazed dismay. He followed her up hurriedly.

"Hazel!" he exclaimed plaintively.

"Well?" she asked, pausing, perhaps, alas, only too willingly.

"You're not going to throw me over? Oh, it will break my heart."

"Then you'll at least know you have one to break."

"Oh, Hazel, is this going to be the end of it?"

"That's just as you like."

"I don't like it at all. Hazel, I promise you, I shan't interfere again. You can do as you please," he cried miserably.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Absolutely, dearest."

"And if you hear people saying ill-natured things about me, are you certain you won't quarrel with them over it?"

"I won't say a word—honor bright."

She smiled rather sadly to see how thoughtlessly he had fallen into the trap she had laid for him. He did not even dream that that was not the answer she had expected. She let him take her in his arms and did not resist. She tried to stifle her disappointment and partly succeeded. But Jocelyn was no longer quite the Jocelyn he was. He was developing feet of clay. But she was young, and aching for a little happiness, and prudent enough not to inquire too deeply whence it derived. At the same time, how-

ever, the thought came to her—she did not know why —how Sir Clement would have handled the situation. And it seemed to her that he would have turned only one of his two faces upon it.

So they wandered on, content in their reconciliation, Jocelyn's arm round her waist.

And so Sir Clement saw them.

He had been away all day on his canvassing round, but on his return had called in at Miss Witherspoon's to make inquiries. And having reassured himself on the point, he had been informed that Miss Middleton was out for a much-needed walk. He thought that Miss Witherspoon had said it rather awkwardly, and that she had hurried away from the subject. They had had their half-term holiday that afternoon, and had made good use of their time on the voting-list. He had thanked her heartily, and strolled on into the copses, stirred by a vague hope that he might meet her. And, as we have seen, so he did.

He had just had time to get behind a clump of hazel-bushes when they passed him, unheeding, having neither eyes nor ears for anything save one another. And he had remained behind, clutching at the bushes with almost as wild a clutch as when his hand had closed upon Will Dallas' throat. Only this time he did not see red. He saw nothing. But he knew what kept Hazel to Woodlands.

Why should he be surprised? Like had always called to like, youth had sought youth since the beginning of time. There was a language that love spoke all the world over, a lingua franca, understood only of those who met in the merry dance on the green meadows of life. And how could he, in his heavy, hulking ruggedness, compare with slim, debonair Jocelyn?

Now too he understood what Miss Witherspoon had

meant in coming to him. Miss Witherspoon was a hard-headed, sensible woman and she at least knew Jocelyn for what he was, a reed, a man of straw. But that was poor consolation to him. His own quest was at an end. He would have to write finis to that chapter of his life, and he could only be thankful that he could do so without having made a bigger fool of himself than he had.

His misery, as yet formless and voiceless, drove him about for two furious hours. He saw that this thing was not yet over for him—his passion-play had not even commenced. Later on, when he would be able to feel again, he would enact that crucifixion all to himself. With dragging gait he limped home. At the entrance to the archway he met Jocelyn. He too seemed to have only just come in. So they had been together all that time! Sir Clement wondered how many kisses that meant.

"Hullo, Clem, I say, I hear a chap's been here for you. For all I know he may be waiting still. Wanted to see you. When I got in some noodle of a servant brought his card to me. Seems he's a detective."

"All right. Thank you," said Sir Clement, looking not at but beyond him.

Jocelyn, as usual, felt inquisitive, but having got his rap over the knuckles the other day, bore himself with restraint. Detectives at the Priory! That was the latest. But, of course, with such a master, innovations might be expected to crowd thick and fast on each other's heels.

Sir Clement found the card in a salver on the hall-stand and went straight to the sitting-room. A man, whom he found there engrossed in a book, rose at his entrance.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Ridley—I didn't expect you till to-morrow."

"Doesn't matter in the least, Sir Clement," smiled the other. "I can't get a train back to-night anyhow. You're

not to be expected at this time to sit at home waiting for callers."

Sir Clement nodded. He wondered whether this man, whose keen eyes seemed able to penetrate a stone wall, would delve in his heart and find out how he had spent the last couple of hours. He had done strange canvassing. He also asked himself whether his business with this man had not in the interval become an act of supererogation, an impertinence. But there was really no difference. His word was to Miss Witherspoon, and she could hold him to it. She was not responsible for what he had seen in the copse.

"Shall we have supper first, Mr. Ridley?"

"Oh, no. I'm in no hurry for it."

"Very well. I don't know, Mr. Ridley, whether you remember the case of a certain Captain Middleton some eight years ago."

The detective sat up and smiled.

"Yes, I remember it very well, Sir Clement. I have good reason for it."

"Have you, indeed? Well, there is a daughter, and she is most anxious to get news of her relatives. Will you undertake the job? Of course, any expense . . ."

"It's strange, Sir Clement," mused the detective, "that you have come to the very man you want. Let me tell you what happened. At the time of the—the incident, Captain Middleton called on me and, though he wasn't very well off, gave me a liberal retaining fee to keep an eye on his wife, his late wife, that is, and child. His only motive, the motive of a gentleman, was to be kept informed in case they were in trouble. A year later—he died . . ."

"And you lost sight of them," broke in Sir Clement, rather disappointed.

"Oh, no, at least not to begin with. The woman in

terested me. I thought she would make a good medium by which to test certain theories of mine."

"Sounds a little cold-blooded, doesn't it, Mr. Ridley?" The detective shrugged.

"Not much sentiment in my trade, Sir Clement," he said dryly. "I had come across a number of cases of people who had seen better days, as the phrase goes. But I always came across them when they had already touched bottom. Some woman had been found dead in a garret in the slums who, it was said, had been presented at Court. Or, again, it was a man who, the talk went, had kept his own racing-stud. I wanted to observe for myself an instance of this gradual sliding down the social ladder."

"Interesting, I should say," smiled Sir Clement. "Go on."

"I thought Mrs. Middleton would make a good case in point. She was bound to get on the rocks, especially after she had quarreled with the man. The Captain told me she had a propensity for drink. Drugs too. That's always the starting-point. After that—*facilis descensus Averno*—excuse my airing my Latin, Sir Clement. It was two years after they went away that Mrs. Middleton left the South-coast cottage, where Sir Thomas Thistlethwaite—her evil genius—had placed her. I don't know the exact reason for the breach, but I rather suspect that it was because the little daughter, a beautiful and precocious girl, was growing up."

"The brute!" Sir Clement muttered fiercely.

"From there they went to a boarding-house in Bloomsbury. Mrs. Middleton called herself Mrs. Marsh, her maiden name—the girl was Sallie Marsh. From Bloomsbury they migrated to two furnished rooms in Brixton. The next milestone was a garret in Deptford. And then they landed eventually in a common lodging-house in the

heart of the slums. For all I know they may be at that address now. If not, some information might be got from there—it's only about two years ago. At that point I gave up my observation, having seen all I wanted to see."

"Good heavens, and was there nothing you could do to help?" exclaimed Sir Clement, greatly moved.

"Well, in the first place, Sir Clement, there was nobody to approach. And then—don't think me a bounder—I was studying the case not as a philanthropist, but as a sociologist, to use rather a grand term."

Sir Clement had risen and was walking about in extreme agitation.

"Do you think anything can be done in the matter, Mr. Ridley?"

"I'll see. I have their last address down in my notebook at home. I'll look it up and start inquiries."

"I want you to do your level best, Mr. Ridley. Don't leave a stone unturned. If necessary set every sleuth-hound in London on the track."

The detective drew himself up.

"Sir Clement, I can't guarantee results. I'm not infallible. But if I take a matter in hand, it's well taken care of."

"Thank you. That's all I ask. And now I have another case for you. You may have heard that some little time back a man round here killed his pal."

"Oh, yes, I read about it. The case attracted some attention in professional circles. There were some novel features about it."

"What was your impression?"

"I couldn't form any. It was difficult to say without having been on the spot. Such circumstantial evidence as there was seemed to leave some doubt in the matter. The man's own story sounded plausible. I should say it de-

pended a good deal on his manner in the witness-box."

"I think, in fact, I'm sure, the man is innocent. At most he could only be accused of manslaughter. To my mind there seemed even to be nothing culpable in it—an accident." He paused for a moment. It seemed strange to him to be stating his own case aloud. "Do you think you could do anything about it, Mr. Ridley?"

"I'm afraid it's rather late in the day. It would be difficult to reconstruct the crime or accident, or whatever it was. But I think a good counsel would serve his turn just as well. Only where is the poor devil to get the money from?"

"I would provide the money."

"Well, he would have every reason to be obliged to you."

"Will you brief one for me when you get back to town?"

"Yes, Sir Clement, with pleasure. I'll go and see a good solicitor."

"Right. And now come along, Mr. Ridley. You must be starving."

But Mr. Ridley was fated to be kept a little longer from his supper. There was a knock at the door and, in response to Sir Clement, Waggles came in, looking terribly shaken.

"Excuse me, Sir Clement, takin' the liberty so late, but have you heard the news?"

"Out with it, Waggles. Something unpleasant, I expect."

"I don't know about bein' unpleasant. Perhaps it was for the best. Tom Wagstaff has gone and done away with himself."

"Oh, the man we were just talking about," said Mr. Ridley quickly.

"Hanged himself by his braces from a nail in the cell.

They say he had been carryin' on somethin' norrible these last days. He left a paper sayin' as he was innocent, but life wasn't worth livin' with Jerry comin' and whisperin' in his ear all the time."

"Yes, I can quite understand," said Sir Clement, nodding with a strained, wiseacre air.

The detective glanced at him curiously.

"You seem to take the matter considerably to heart, Sir Clement."

"Another judicial blunder," came the vehement reply. "It wasn't suicide. It was the law, or rather the stupidity of its administrators, that killed this man. He never had justice here and he went to the only place where he would find it. It's intolerable. When will the world give up its iniquitous practice of judging by appearances?" He saw his listeners' astonishment and pulled himself up short. "Yes, I've let myself go a bit, but it's difficult to speak calmly. . . . Good night, Waggles. Will you follow me, Mr. Ridley?"

Mr. Ridley had his supper and departed early, not finding Sir Clement particularly good company. For the latter was very busy with the new phenomenon that had swept into his horizon. Another sign, another warning! Tom Wagstaff's action had an import of its own. It was obvious that, for himself, Tom had chosen the better part. He was at rest now, no dull pain in his heart, nobody whispering in his ear. Was he pointing a moral, an example?

The notion had come to him once before, and he had rejected it then as he rejected it now. Although now he felt more strongly the temptation of it, as he thought of Hazel and Jocelyn in the copse. But the instinct for battle was strong in him. He would not cower back on his haunches, gibbering grotesquely, averting his face from the grim phantom of his despair. By thunder, he would

see this thing through. He would not go down with a moaning "vae victis" on his lips.

Providence did not mean him to give in. She had sent him a great revelation which, he saw with the eyes of prophecy, was to bring in its wake a still greater. And he had a foreboding that it would be fraught with a greater pain, even with the bitterness of death.

No, not Tom Wagstaff's way. Another road to atonement was opening for him. The girl with the Madonna face was there to guide him to it. She walked about with Jocelyn's arm round her waist. They kissed innumerable kisses in the silence of the glens. Those kisses were not without their meaning to him. They carried a tremendous message.

And then how could he die when he had pledged himself to do a service for her? Ah, this service, was there a meaning in it too? Groping for a hidden design in everything, he felt that in rendering it, he would not be laying up an advantage for himself. He would never be aught but a step-son of fortune. With the finding of her lost ones, if he found them, a new chapter of complications was beginning for him. And perhaps he would have to give it a harder name.

Oh, it was all in the game. He almost rejoiced in the prospect. When a man's hands were full, he might more easily forget his emptiness of heart.

CHAPTER XIII

GOLGOTHA OR GILEAD?

SIR CLEMENT had been defeated, narrowly, but still defeated. The oligarchy had triumphed. Not that he took it much to heart. Next time, if there was a next time, he would win. Now he could go at the task that lay to hand. One did not need a parliamentary cachet for doing good. He sat with Kenneth Hobhouse in his study that evening, adumbrating plans.

"Yes, Ken, we'll do great things," he said, thumping the table.

"Plenty of room, too," said Ken dryly. "We ought to begin with the drainage. Part of the village is a positive cesspool."

"I'm leaving you a free hand, Ken."

He rose and walked to the balcony to cool his fevered head. He felt strangely ill at ease. The reaction had set in. After the excitement of these past days, the crowded hours, the rush and whir of active doings, the congregating with many men, he would now be thrown back again on his own company. And the outlook terrified him. He had come here with a burden on his soul. To this had added itself a torment of his heart. Where would his calamities end?

"I say, Clem." He heard Ken calling and he faced round inquiringly.

"There's something I've been wanting to say to you for some time. When I was packing up to come here, I

found a letter from a chap, Will Dallas. I don't know if you remember him—he was kicked out of school. He wrote from somewhere in Africa, saying he was starving and asking for money. He seems to have written the same sort of yarn to Jack Seymour and others, evidently cadging all round his old acquaintances. I was wondering if you had happened across him out there."

"I did, Ken."

"Then he must have cost you something," laughed Ken.

"Yes, Ken. He cost me a lot. He's costing me still."

Again the call of that dead voice from the past. It seemed to sound louder, more threatening. It had come so close, so close—Tom Wagstaff too had complained of his dead pal whispering in his ear. And now only one thing was lacking—to see Will Dallas himself, to see his ghostly presence thrusting itself upon him and reëstablishing the old intimacy.

And Will Dallas did.

As Sir Clement got to his bedroom, he saw Will standing at the table, cleaning his Winchester, just as he had done that other time. Even his whistling was audible. The splendid, wainscoted chamber, in which kings had slept, transformed itself into the mean loghouse, and the whole grim scene acted itself over again. Hammer and tongs they went at it. But when it was over there was an epilogue.

Calmly, dispassionately Sir Clement began to state his case. To the end of his days he never knew if he had actually uttered the words or only thought them. But Will was deaf to all argument. He simply lay there in scornful silence, answering never a word—his dead white eyes turned on Sir Clement, his mouth crooked in an ironic grin. And then, gradually, the mirage dissolved.

Sir Clement felt himself clutching at it with frenzied

hands, then he sought for a hold in the empty air, his brain blazed up in a prismatic flame and, with a thud, he fell.

It must have been an hour before he came to. Nobody had heard his fall. As he sat up, the night seemed to sing with its heat. It throbbed with a rapid rhythm, which he did not know was but the echo of his hammering temples. With a shaking hand he poured himself out a glass of liquor and tossed it down.

It steadied him. His thoughts shaped themselves in more orderly array. The tremendous experience he had gone through seemed to have cleared his mind as the air is cleared by a thunderstorm. He still, however, saw visions. But instead of the spectral presence of Will Dallas, there stood before him a warmly glowing, iridescent form, the girl with the Madonna face. And now, too, there came to him the illumination he had sought—the knowledge of the connection there was between the inmate of that peaceful, ivy-clad cottage and that loghouse with its wild memories.

She was the avenger Will Dallas had sent him. In his grave Will had ample leisure to think out diabolical schemes, and this one did full justice to his cunning and hatred. This was the punishment with which he would afflict his enemy, this his retribution. And Sir Clement knew by now that there could be none worse.

History, the poets, had spoken of the pangs of unrequited love. He had come across it in his personal touch with men. But he had never understood it—he had only smiled at it. It seemed to him a sixth sense with which, fortunately, he had remained uncursed. But he knew it at last. That was why this thing had come upon him so suddenly, like a thief in the night. He had been doomed

to love her at sight, without warning, without a chance of armoring his heart in triple steel.

And it was not a fierce, volcanic spasm that might burn itself out quickly by its very intensity, but a nagging yet tender agony that seemed constantly on the brink of tears. He thought of her innocence, of her defenselessness, at the mercy of a Jocelyn. A melancholy longing stole over him to take her in his protecting arms and shield her from all the Jocelyns and Josephines in the world. And he never would. She was no willing avenger. If she knew she would probably be sorry for him. But his aching heart she would not, she could not, cure. Her province was to do just the very contrary.

He must bear his cross. He must bear it with joy, glad that his sufferings might some day, when he had paid full toll, enable him to cry quits with his conscience. And meanwhile he must not forget the duty he owed her. He opened a drawer and pulled out the wire he had received from Ridley some days ago.

"Mother and daughter still living at 7 Paradise Lane, Hoxton."

He would go to seek them.

And in doing so he would be serving his own purpose as well. It was not new to him, this resolution which he now suddenly clinched. He would flee the hypocritical crowd that surrounded him. He would go back to the bedrock of things. He would go to the places where red raw slices were cut from the quivering flanks of life, where lived real men and women, their primitive instincts unblunted. He had mixed with such men and women before —he longed to mix with them again. It would be like a welcome home.

He went to the wardrobe where hung the navvy clothes in which he had made his first appearance at the Priory.

He had been loth to get rid of them. They were something of his old self, when, sore-stricken though he already was, he had still hugged to himself the remnants of a trembling hope. And he nodded to them as to old friends. They were good enough to work in. And work was the prayer of striving hands and perhaps, by the mercy of God, oblivion

The morning had come on apace, and there was a great twittering in the trees. He was all ready. He could well leave his affairs in Kenneth's hands. Ken should know that he was going—he could be trusted.

And now only one thing more. She was sending him away, but he would not go like a beaten cur, his tail between his legs. He would meet her frankly, head erect, knowing she could not do him worse than she had done. There was comfort in the thought. Not often is it given to a man to derive a solace from his very martyrdom.

It was eight o'clock. Surely she would be down by now. Her freshness, the clearness of her voice, always recalled to him the matutinal orisons of the lark. She rose probably little later than that herald of the morning.

He was right. She admitted him at the front door, radiant with the dewiness of an Anadyomene newly risen from the foam.

"Oh, do come in!" she urged him, as she saw him hesitate.

"Such an unearthly hour," he mumbled, following her into the sitting-room.

The breakfast things were laid, but Miss Witherspoon had not yet appeared. He did not know that she had been on the point of descending when, through the window, she had noticed him approach and had kept back. She was rather hungry too. But being a woman of great perception, she had seen a certain great hunger peer out of Sir

Clement's eyes and thought that ought to be satisfied first.

"I almost cried when I heard the result of the poll last night," Hazel burst out impetuously.

"I'm glad you saved your tears for a worthier cause."

"Such a lot of labor wasted!"

"My dear young lady, labor is never wasted," he said rather sententiously. "You will find that in every text-book on the indestructibility of matter and energy."

"It will come in handy for the next push. Of course you'll stand again, and then there won't be so much spade-work to be done. Will you have a cup of coffee, Sir Clement?"

"Thank you, I will. And we will call it a stirrup cup."

"What, are you going away?" she asked quickly.

"I am," was his grave reply.

"Back to Africa?"

"Not quite so far."

"For long?"

"I can't say how long."

"I see," she said rather vaguely.

"I called to thank you, Miss Middleton. You've been a brick. You and Miss Witherspoon worked like Trojans." He paused and added as though by way of an afterthought. "Don't be afraid—you won't be molested at your work. Mr. Hobhouse will watch your interests while I'm away."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Sir Clement," she said pensively.

He did not ask her what she was thinking of. He knew. Of the joy of meetings with Jocelyn, untrammeled by the presence of his patron.

But he was wrong. She was conscious of a vague regretfulness at his going. That undercurrent of resentment had not dried up. But her closer contact with him had

engendered a feeling of comradeship. His unfailing kindliness, his unvarying courtesy had appealed to her, his unerring judgment astonished her. Perhaps it was this sound judgment of his which had made him refuse Jocelyn's request. And though that did not entirely extinguish the offense, it extenuated his seeming harshness. Yes, she was indubitably sorry he was going.

"I would like to ask you a question, Sir Clement," she said abruptly. From her manner it would seem that the question cost her an effort.

"Ask away," he smiled.

"Why have you, for days, avoided looking me in the face?"

"Have I? Then see what I have lost."

"I'm not fishing for compliments," she said with a flush. "I have mentioned it to Miss Witherspoon and she says you look at her frankly enough, and that I was a fool. Have I in any way offended you?"

"My dear Miss Middleton, my recollections of you will always be of the pleasantest."

He spoke the lie with a stony face. No, she should never know how deeply the iron had entered his soul.

"I should like to say good-by to Miss Witherspoon."

She left the room without a word and called:

"Tabitha, Sir Clement."

Miss Witherspoon came in and when she heard, expressed great regret, but nodded understandingly. There was also something of approval in that nod. Perhaps she was thinking of a certain adage about absence and its alleged effect on one of the anatomical organs.

"I am going to find them," he whispered to her in the hall.

"Good luck to you, and God bless you," she whispered back.

Then he went, not casting another look behind.

And now he sat in the train. It was a slow train and at each stop the guard came out and called the name of the station, adding the destination: "London!" But to Sir Clement it was not "London" he cried. It was another name, which at first he could not distinguish, until it slowly shaped itself in his brain and rang out threatening, terrifying.

"Golgotha!" was that name.

And deep within him, as he sat with clasped hands and bowed head, a wistful voice murmured longingly, prayerfully:

"Gilead—oh, Gilead!"

Oh, for the balm of which he was sorely in need, and he wondered—if he would ever attain to that Promised Land where the searcher finds what he seeks and loses the fear of himself in the finding.





PART II
THE BOOK OF SALLIE





CHAPTER I

THE RED RAW FLANK

THE two ladies, with half-clad shoulders and frowsy heads, were exchanging compliments from opposite windows of the narrow street, the upper tenements of which leaned towards each other as though whispering evil confidences.

Said the first lady: "If I catches him again near my doorstep, I'll break his bloomin' neck, the little . . ." And she used a word which cast a great slur on the good repute of the youngster's mother.

Replied the second lady: "If yer does, I'll pull yer dirty wig out by handfuls."

"What did he want to take her rapple away for, the little so-and-so?" continued the dialogue.

"He never took her rapple away. He had one of his own. I give it him. Your brat never had none. Where did you have a copper from to buy her a rapple? 'Less you pinched it from a stall. You know you're kep' by the parish, barrin' the bit you makes on the quiet and that you wouldn't like your old man to know about neither."

It seemed the second lady was likely to carry the day, having a more fluent tongue and an ampler wind.

The tall, broad-shouldered stranger, in a garb that suggested a sea-faring man on shore, thought it indelicate to listen to any further revelations and moved on to look for Number 7. For this was Paradise Lane, so miscalled by a man with a fine sense of irony. For it bore not the

least resemblance to leafy country-walks and was obviously a gross libel on the alleged beauties of the Garden of Eden.

The stranger found Number 7 without any difficulty. Here there was more noise. Through an open window came the fierce yelping of dogs and the hoarse-throated laughter of men, mingled with encouraging shouts. He stepped in quietly and without haste. To the right of the dark passage was a door from which the clamor proceeded. He pushed it open and entered a large room, low of ceiling, permeated by the acrid smell of a bloater frying in the open grate.

A dog fight was in process. Two wretched curs were struggling with one another, to the delight of a small circle of men surrounding them. The man in the sea-faring garb looked at the scene for a moment and then stepped quickly into the arena. One of the animals was in store straits. He had bare patches all over his body and one of his ears hung bloody and dilapidated. The stranger stooped, seized the top-dog by the wind-pipe till he made him let go and then hurled him far across the room. The other ran whimpering away.

Then pandemonium broke loose. Angry faces closed in on the man, threatening fists were flourished. But none struck. There was a look of power in the newcomer's face that held him immune. They drew back, contenting themselves with a storm of recrimination.

"Why didn't you let the tikes have it out?" asked the politest of them.

"Because they were no match. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

Derisive laughter greeted him.

"Hats off, blokes. Here's a bloomin' archbishop!" cried one of them.

He had attracted Sir Clement's notice from the first. He was a handsome, upstanding young fellow with curly hair and pansy-blue eyes. He seemed to be looked upon as one in authority by his mates.

"You've got it, Curley. Right fust go!" came a chorus.

Curley stepped up to Sir Clement with a superior argumentative air.

"Now look here, guv-ner, this ain't no bizness o' yourn. Them dogs was scrappin' for a wager. The little 'un was mine. I had backed him to last twenty minutes. I was winnin'. Now what are you goin' to do about it?"

"Do about it? Nothing."

"All right. Then I'll have you locked up for trespassin'. You don't belong here. Nobody knows you."

Sir Clement smiled. This was the second time he was threatened with the offense. He thought of his first meeting with Waggles in the Priory grounds.

"We'll soon remedy that, my boy," he said quietly. "I'm going to live here. I've come in for a room."

"Oh, have you? Here, ma!" Curley shouted across the room to a fat old lady, who had been slumbering serenely through all the hurly-burly. "Here's a royal dook come to engage a soot o' rooms!"

Then he turned back to Sir Clement.

"Now that I've arranged that for you, old hoss, what about our little affair?"

"How much did you stand to win on your wager?"

"A dollar," said Curley promptly, quintupling the sum.

Sir Clement put his hand in his pocket and drew out two half crowns.

"That'll square you, won't it?"

Curley looked at the coins first in astonishment, then sulkily, and finally made a grab at them. So this fellow,

who was able to chuck money about, was going to live in the house. Curley had a particular reason for objecting to that.

"You're a toff, guv'ner," he said, touching his cap. Then he sank his voice to a whisper. "And now I'll give you a piece o' good advice. Don't dig here."

"Why not?"

Curley made a grimace of disdain, such as only the born cockney can produce. It blends ridicule with a subtle inflection of supreme contempt, and he has made a fine art of it.

"No class," he said. "Not a mother's son here fit to talk to."

"Nor a daughter either?" smiled Sir Clement. "Then what are you doing here?"

"I don't live here. I only look in once in a while. It's a rotten show. There's a nobbier place round the corner. Come on. I'll take you there."

"Don't trouble. I'm not particular. This'll do me all right."

"I tell you it's no bloomin' good."

"I'll see for myself."

"Then see and be damned to you," shouted Curley in a sudden access of anger and flung out of the room.

The others trooped out after him. Curley was not going to liquefy all that largess at the "Crown and Anchor" without generous assistance.

Sir Clement walked up to the fat old lady, who was wide awake by now, scenting profitable business, and began arrangements. She took him up to a room on the first floor, commodious and fairly clean. She named a figure that would pay half the rent of the house. Sir Clement agreed without demur. Mrs. Crowley grew effusive.

"I hopes as you'll be comf'table here, sir," she said.



"Don't take your cue from the riff-raff you saw downstairs. I've got some fust-rate respectable folk stayin' here. There's Mr. and Mrs. Cripps, livin' independent. And there's the Marshes. . . ."

But at this point Mrs. Crowley suddenly snatched up the corner of her apron and burst into a furious fit of weeping.

"Oh, I forgot. Poor soul, poor soul!"

Sir Clement's heart stopped.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Crowley?"

"Mrs. Marsh died last night. I hopes you won't mind a corpse in the 'ouse. It'll only be a few hours. In the mornin' the dust-cart—I means the parish hearse is comin' to fetch her away."

Sir Clement smiled vacuously. He felt such a fool. He had come too late by a day and his errand would, at least partially, remain unfulfilled. Well, he would see what could be done with the other part. But he asked no questions. It would not do to give this shrewd old woman any inkling that he had a purpose in coming here.

Slowly, meditatively he walked down again to the common-room. It was empty, save for an elderly couple who seemed to have been waiting for his return. The man came up to him briskly.

"Afternoon, guv'ner," he said.

Sir Clement answered politely.

"My name's Cripps, John Adalbert Cripps, and this 'ere is my old woman."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Cripps."

"Fixed up all right? You mustn't mind young Curley. He allus makes hisself a bit of a noosance, but he's all right when you gets to know him. No, she ain't his mother. But we all calls her ma for short. Hot day, ain't it?"

"Yes, very warm."

"Makes your throat dry, like, don't it? Bess'll fetch it, if you like."

It dawned on Sir Clement that he was expected to stand treat. With a laugh he threw a coin on the table. The place seemed swimming in beer. Mrs. Cripps left the room instantly.

"Just come off your ship?" inquired Mr. Cripps.

"Eh, what? Oh, yes."

"You sailor chaps is allus flush. Good game, what?"

"Moderately good."

Mr. Cripps chatted on affably till Mrs. Cripps returned with a foaming jug. Three glasses made a miraculously instantaneous appearance on the table.

"Here's to our better hacquaintance, Mr.—Mr. . . ."

"Black," said Sir Clement, observing to himself that this was the third time he had changed his name.

"Ha, ha, not so black as you're painted, eh?" And Mr. Cripps laughed uproariously, filling his glass again and keeping the jug solicitously in front of him. "Well, Mr. Black, you're a sailor and I've been a soldier, so we'll shake on that" They did. "Sergeant in the Royal Munsters. Pension o' twenty-two and a tanner a week." He suddenly thumped the table with great violence. "And that's what makes it all the harder to bear. There's no justice under heaven, Mr. Black."

"You seem to have a grievance, Mr. Cripps," said Sir Clement, feigning interest, though his thoughts were busy elsewhere.

"A grievance? As big as the Tower o' Babel. I ought to be leadin' a gennelman's life now, with a big screw and a himportant Gov'ment position, eh, Bess?" Mr. Cripps cried wrathfully

"Yes, that he hought," assented Mrs. Cripps with a mournful shake of her head.

"Yes, sir. I was in the last lap, among the three final *see*lected candidates out o' five hundred."

"For what, Mr. Cripps?" Sir Clement asked, puzzled.

"That was when old Billington pegged out, and they wanted a new 'un. I sends in my happlication and they has me up at the Old Bailey. There was a Committee sittin' there, doctors and p'licemen, all kinds o' toffs. They puts me through a sort o' cross-examination. They asks me if I was prepared, if need be, to hang my own father and mother. I says yes cheerfully, they both bein' gone to Kingdom Come."

"But you'd have strung me all right, Bert, wouldn't you?" said Mrs. Cripps, with an air of reproachful pride.

"Strung anybody, short o' myself," Mr. Cripps responded with enthusiasm. "Well, I had brought with me the model of a gallows I had made myself, trap-door and all, and I shows it to 'em. I've got it now, Mr. Black, and sometimes, when I feels a bit dull and down in the mouth, I catches an odd cat and pop! down she goes. It allus cheers me up wonnerful, don't it, Bess?"

"Makes you lively as a cricket," testified Mrs. Cripps.

"If you'll come to our room one day, Mr. Black, I'll show you how I do the trick."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Cripps," Sir Clement replied wryly.

"Well, as I was a-sayin'," Mr. Cripps resumed after his digression, "they was all 'ighly hinterested, and I laughs up my sleeve, thinkin' I had as good as landed the job, and then, what d'you think 'appens—yes, I says, what d'you think 'appens?" repeated Mr. Cripps, indignation blazing out of his small pig eyes

"Yes, Mr. Cripps, what happened?"

"One o' the gents gets up and says: 'Mr. Cripps, we thinks as you're a most suitable man, but we are of hopinion that the man who has worn the king's uniform should



CHAPTER II

A FUNERAL

THE room had become very silent. There was only the buzz of innumerable blue-bottles and from outside came the cries of children playing in the gutter. The girl noticed nothing. She sat crouching over the few miserable embers in the grate and, despite the hot July sun streaming in through the uncurtained windows, shivered visibly.

From where he sat Sir Clement had her in a straight line of vision. He had seen her come in, walking with the lissom grace of a young panther, swaying downwards from the hips. And now, with her clenched hands propping up her chin, there was about her a free, spontaneous attitude of mute revolt. Had he not known, he would never have guessed her to be very own sister to the girl with the Madonna face. For the one had the serene beauty of a spring dawn, and this one almost the sinister grandeur of a gathering storm.

It was a face in a million. The glossily black mane framed a forehead of purest white. Round the cold, finely chiseled mouth played a lordly disdain. And her eyes . . . Up to now he had only seen them with that glazed, sleep-walking look in them. But as she turned them on him with a glance of fleeting indifference, he saw them flash like scimitars. What a strange contrast, these two sisters! One, the descendant of some Norse Viking, the other a throw-back to a buccaneering forbear, who had cruised the Spanish main and had carried off the daughter of a proud hidalgo for a mate.

But that was not the only thing which made Sir Clement ponder. He thought of Hazel's mimosa-like daintiness, her diffident delicacy of feeling, and remembered that this girl here had spent years in the society of Crippses and Curleys and drunken derelict sots. What a responsibility to bring them together as they were, what a blunder! He must step warily. It mattered not to him whether he gained Hazel's gratitude or not. But not to bring into her sorrowful life a new grief, a greater than she bore now, for that indeed he must use all his circumspection.

He walked up to the girl with a heavy tread so as to advise her of his coming.

"What's the matter, girlie?" he asked, towering over her.

"Nothing to do with you," flashed back her retort. Then she looked up and scanned him with some surprise. "I thought I didn't know the voice. Who are you?"

"A new lodger."

Her chin sank again on her propping hands and she sat silent.

"Won't you tell me what's the trouble?" he asked again after a pause.

"No, I won't. Get away."

For answer he moved over a chair and sat down close to her. She edged away a little, shooting him a fierce sidelong glance.

"Well, if you want to sit there, sit. This room's public."

"I hear your mother is dead," he resumed.

"If you know, then why bother me with questions?" The mutinous note in her voice was becoming stronger.

"Going to be buried to-morrow, I understand."

She looked at him full and gave a laugh that made him shudder.

"Buried? Shoveled into a pauper's grave, if you call that being buried!" she cried bitterly.

an ineffable anguish, a wonderful love, more poignant than the most articulate grief.

"And now that you are all alone," he went on, "aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid of what?" she asked in surprise.

"This is not a nice place," he said gently.

"What's the matter with it? To me it's home, the only home I know. And the people are all right if you know how to stand up to them. I've learnt that." Her hands clenched menacingly. "They'll think twice before they take liberties with me. Besides, there's Curley."

Yes, there was Curley. He had come in with a bleary—one should say, beery—look in his eyes and he zigzagged up to her with widespread arms.

"Hullo, Sallie, down again? Come and give us a kiss, old gal."

"Get away with you—behave yourself," she said, pushing him roughly away.

"Oh, all right, all right. Keep your hair on. So the old woman has hooked it, eh? Now p'raps you'll have more time to get about." He caught sight of Sir Clement and staggered up to him with maudlin but grim good humor. "So you've been pallin' on with my Sal, have you? Better be careful, old boy. Keep off the grass. 'Nough said."

And with that he took himself off to the recess by the window and a moment or two later his heavy breathing announced him to have fallen into a drunken sleep. Sir Clement stood wrinkling his brows.

"What's this between you and Curley?" he asked.

She threw up her head with something like defiance.

"We're keeping company."

"Going to get married?" There was deep anxiety in his voice.

"Where?"

"Away in the colonies."

"Oh, you needn't worry, in that case. There are plenty of them going about here that have made away with their man. Every now and then the houses about here are rounded up and somebody is taken away. But that's only when some one has narked—that is, informed against them. Where do you come from?"

"From another world."

"I could see that. You're something more than you make yourself out to be. You're a swell—a gentleman."

"And from the way you talk, you're a lady."

Again she laughed shrilly.

"I a lady—Sallie Marsh a lady? Well, what next!" She looked at him sharply and then went on carelessly. "Mother was a governess in some good houses. She taught me to talk well, and made me keep it up, even when we came down to this."

He felt touched. The pitiful lie, invented on the spur of the moment, to cloak her mother's dishonor! And then, suddenly, he became angry.

"But you're not a good daughter. You don't seem to have loved her very much. You're callous."

She gazed at him almost in affright and then made a passionate gesture.

"Not loved—not loved my sweet little mother? Yes, and that's why I thanked God all last night that she was dead, and released. Oh, how she suffered!" And she twined her fingers frenziedly at the recollection. "Cancer. They took her away to the hospital and cut her about cruelly and then sent her back here to die. Oh, thank God she is dead! Yes, I suppose you do become callous here."

He heard her with infinite compassion. From her hard words, unshaken by the merest hint of a sob, there rang

an ineffable anguish, a wonderful love, more poignant than the most articulate grief.

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"Lord, it's a far cry to that," she laughed mirthlessly.

He had only one other question for her and he awaited the answer with considerable trepidation.

"What do you do for a living, Sallie?"

"A living? I work, of course."

"What at?"

"I'm a machinist in a cabinet-maker's shop. Look—my trade-mark!"

She held up her right hand, and he saw the scar of a deep-wedged wound in her forefinger.

"How did you get that?"

"Usual way. It might have been half a finger—might have been a whole hand. That happens every day. The very devil's in those machines sometimes. Well, I must be off to the undertaker's."

She had not made him the least acknowledgment for his gift. He was almost grateful to her for it. She had reminded him that he had come to a land where the ordinary usages of life did not obtain. He had come to an aboriginal race, living in moral and physical meagerness, whittling away all superfluities. It is not recorded that people said "Thank you" to one another in the Stone Age.

He spent the rest of the day by himself, wandering about amid the labyrinthine net-work of streets, acclimatizing himself to his environments. But he felt at home already. It was, he repeated to himself, only the old life in a different setting. Squalor and sordidness were not new to him. He had seen so many foul sights, had heard so many ugly sounds that there was little in the world left to offend his senses. To Sallie he, for the present, gave no further thought. She would come later.

In the morning he helped to carry down the coffin. Sallie was waiting on the pavement, looking about her im-

patiently. At length Curley came along, resplendent in a black tie and bowler hat.

"Gosh, what a swell affair! Pair-horse hearse, plumes, mutes, coach and all! Where did you get the cash from, Sallie?"

"Mother had a stocking," she replied, warned by Sir Clement's quick look.

"And kept you so short all the time," Curley said disagreeably. "What, is old Tiny comin' as well?"

"Yes, Curley. I want to get a ride on the cheap."

"What the deuce have you got to do with this 'ere funeral?"

"Nothing, really. But if you don't like my company, Curley, you can stay behind."

Curley looked at Sallie, but she gave no sign of a desire to interfere in the dispute. Then, cowed by Sir Clement's masterful look, he scrambled into the carriage, mumbling something about the waste of good money.

It was a silent drive. Curley sulked all the way, turning his back on Sallie. Sallie did not notice it, sitting dry-eyed, with tight-pressed lips, though to Sir Clement there could be no mistaking the surging tumult of emotion she kept under control. So tragedy might have looked if hewn into a statue of breathing stone.

And Sir Clement thought bitterly of the gratuitousness of it all. He thought of the wrecked home, of the gallant soldier who would not survive his heartache and disgrace, of the poor victim who was at last to lay her sorrows on the consoling bosom of Mother Earth—the great Mother, so prodigal of her cruelty and yet always ready to show the last crowning kindness to all her children.

And what he tried not to think of was Hazel and her loneliness.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW HAND STRIKES

THE next morning Sir Clement caught Sallie just as she was leaving the house for the shop.

"Just a minute, Sal. Think I could get a job at your place? I've got to get to work."

"There you are. You clean yourself out for me and now you're broke," she said almost angrily.

"I'm not broke, Sallie. But I'd have to start sooner or later. I know something about wood-work."

"Oh, come along, then. There are always hands wanted. I dare say the governor can find you a bench."

Sir Clement did not speak at random. In his youth he had been handy with lathe and plane, had made it a hobby. His father had fitted up a small workshop for him, and an old carpenter came and gave him instruction. He did not think his hand had forgotten its cunning.

It was a large factory in the open road. A score of men were already hard at work before they came—overtime was the mainstay of their livelihood and they were glad to put in the extra hour before the scheduled start. The master, an undersized, middle-aged man with flickering eyes, looked the newcomer up and down with approval which, however, he was careful not to voice. Good brawn and muscle there. The secret of the man's success was not to let his underlings know their value. If they knew what they were worth to him, they would be worth a good deal less to him and a good deal more to themselves. Of course there was such a thing as the market-price, but that was never the

same as the intrinsic price. He calculated rapidly that the new chap should mean about five pounds a week in increment to him.

"I really want a carver, but I dare say I can do with you. How much an hour?"

"Half a dollar," said Sir Clement, having been coached by Sallie on the way.

"Don't pay more than two-and-three."

"All right. Two-and-thrippence."

"Take your coat off. Here's a time-sheet. Where's your tools?"

"I'll get 'em later."

"Uncle taking care of 'em, eh?" sniggered the man. "I'll lend you some to go on with."

And presently the new hand was in the thick of it. A quick feeling of exhilaration coursed through his veins. The whir of the machinery was a weird music that set his blood dancing. He had been told off to do planing on some overmantels. He went at it with a will and the heap of wood-flakes that soon piled up around him gladdened the master's heart. Hands in pockets, Mr. Franks walked up to Sallie, who was working the circular saw.

"Always glad to take on a pal of yours, Sallie," he said, looking at her with his quick-glancing eyes.

"Get away with you—don't talk to me at the machine," Sallie snapped back at him.

"That's right, Sallie, keep me from breaking my own rules," he said, moving away a little.

"And don't stand there gaping at me. You make me nervous."

He made no reply but went away with a queer chuckle in his throat.

There was variety in the work. Presently the new hand was called away to help bring in a load of timber that had

just arrived. He enjoyed it greatly, reveling in his physical strength. He shouldered six boards where the other men carried only two or three. Mr. Franks rubbed his hands delightedly. Here was treasure-trove. He was standing by with his note-book, taking tally and jotting down the sizes marked in blue-penciled hieroglyphics on each board. And all the time he was wrangling with the timber-dealer over the measurements.

"What, call this twenty and a half? I can't make it more than nineteen by twelve," he shouted, and his two-foot rule darted quickly over the plank. In this way he was about fifty feet of mahogany to the good, which at eighteen pence a foot, meant so and so much in his pocket.

And then the whistle blew for dinner.

"Coming out?" the new hand asked of Sallie.

"No, I've got my grub here," and she pointed to her hunk of bread and cheese. "You've spent enough on me as it is."

"As you please," he said, walking out.

"Sallie, the missis wants you upstairs," said Mr. Franks.

"The missis can go and fish. I'm here as a machinist and not as a slavey."

"All right, all right, don't get waxy."

But when she went upstairs to the little kitchen, set aside for the workers, to boil her kettle of tea, she found Mr. Franks hovering round. He had no legitimate business there. Silently Sallie stuffed a few chunks of waste-wood into the open grate—Mr. Franks would not go to the expense of a gas-stove—and waited. So did Mr. Franks.

"Kettle'll boil all the quicker if you'll clear out," said Sallie.

"This any good to you, Sallie?" he whispered, thrusting a treasury note into her hand.

"Yes, it'll make a bit of a blaze," she said, dropping it into the flames. "Got any more of 'em?"

He looked aghast, then went away hastily with a muttered curse.

Sir Clement went to the coffee-shop next door and did justice to the rough fare. It was grateful to his palate after the rich menus of the Priory, although he had always practiced abstemiousness. He liked the thought of feeding in company of men who ate to live. These men did the world's work. During the past months he had been a drone, and into the empty days had crowded the fullness of the past. In the labor of his hands he had hoped to find forgetfulness, and it seemed to him he had a chance of succeeding. Already the other life was moving away into the distance.

Of course, Hazel still held her place, would always hold it. But, for the time being, at any rate, her presence was rendered less vivid by his interest in her little sister. The phrase had for him a melancholy sweetness. What would he not have given if he could think of her as being his "little sister" one day! Yes, it was only fair that Hazel, the Avenger, should grant him a truce. He was using the respite in doing what she would most wish him to do.

In the afternoon he was put on "cramping," and Sallie assigned to him as a helper. It was work of which he had little or no experience. It needed something more than the dilettante leisureliness of his hobby days. Swift judgment was required and slickness in the fitting of the frames, for other hands were waiting to put them through the completing stages.

But Sallie helped him through. Quick as lightning she handed him the pieces composing the frames. Her keen eye saw where the joints were out of square. Her hand moved to the exact half-inch of the heavy iron implement, the

twist of which gave to the corners the correct angle. Very ingenious, too, she was in obliterating "shakes" and filling in worm-holes with a sticky conglomeration of sand and glue.

So the day went on, bringing a succession of similar days. Sir Clement was well content. The workshop became his element. The day's toil brought its reward in dreamless sleep. And in his waking hours there was certainly little room for the nightmares.

On Saturday morning his neighbor, Tim O'Hara, came in looking very troubled.

"What's the matter, Tim?"

"Two of the kids ill. Doctor says they ought to go away to the counthry. Counthry indeed! What's he take me for—the Dook o' Westminister?"

At one o'clock, when Sir Clement got his pay envelope, three pounds two shillings and two pence, fourpence having been deducted for insurance, he slipped it into O'Hara's coat hanging next to his own. On Monday morning Tim glanced at the new hand suspiciously, but said nothing. Was the fellow really such a fool as to drop his money into the wrong pocket?

"I don't know what I did with my pay envelope on Saturday," said Sir Clement offhand.

"Don't you?" said Tim. "Well, I'm sure I don't. Why the blazes ain't you more careful?"

At that Sir Clement got angry, and that was the reason why the fairies played no more tricks with O'Hara's coat.

On the Saturday afternoon Sallie had come and offered Sir Clement five shillings.

"That's all I can spare," she said.

"What's that for?" he asked in surprise.

"Paying back. Think I'm going to take your money?"

"Oh!" he said. "I'd sooner have it in a lump."

"Then you'll have to wait forty weeks."

"Don't care if it's forty years."

He turned away, and she looked after him with a curious look—it was almost a light—in her eyes.

That evening came Curley—she had sent him away all the other nights, keeping to her room—and found her sitting by the window.

"Make much this week?" he asked.

"About the usual."

"You don't trouble about me," he said bitterly.

"I can't give you anything, Curley."

"Oh, you can't," he said, frowning. "The old woman don't eat nothing now. Who's gettin' the money you spent on the med'cine?"

"I'm saving up for a diamond tiara." She was thinking not only of her debt to Tiny, but of the sumptuous headstone that was to adorn poor little mother's grave.

"Fine treatment you're givin' me, I don't think," he growled.

"I like to be with her. When I'm upstairs it makes me feel she's still there."

"Then I'll know where to find you."

"Curley, if ever you set foot in that room, I'll brain you."

His hand closed round her nape. The cheap black blouse she wore made its dazzling whiteness very tempting.

"You'll kill yourself with mopin'," he said more gently.

"Don't!" she said, disengaging herself.

He was about to flare up but restrained himself. Even to his muddled way of thinking it was clear that her state of mind must be out of the normal.

"Come to the pictures," he urged her.

"No. I can't laugh at Charlie Chaplin's upturned boots with her scarcely cold in her grave."

"You'd go with Tiny, wouldn't you?" he burst out.

"He's never asked me. And if he did, I don't suppose he'd keep on kissing and mauling me about in the dark as you do."

"Ho, now you don't like me kissin' you!"

"Never cared much for it."

"And now I dessay less than never."

"What's now?" she asked, giving him a square look.

"Now you've got Tiny."

She laughed disdainfully—he knew the disdain was meant for him.

"Curley, if you play the jealous, you'll make me think I'm watching Charlie Chaplin after all."

"You're gettin' thick with Tiny," he persisted.

"Gracious, Curley, he doesn't give me a thought."

"But you're thinkin' all the more of him."

She leaped to her feet, but he caught her by the arm and detained her.

"Sit down, Sallie, and I'll be a good boy," he promised.

She sat down again rather listlessly, and he took her hand and toyed with it. Greatly to his gratification she did not object. And then he talked to her on less controversial topics. Gave her an account of the prize-fight he had been to the night before. Thought that he could have knocked the winner into a cocked hat. Some chaps had all the luck. He never had had his chance—jealousy kept him out of the magic ring.

But his day would come. There was some talk about putting him up against Alf Grady, the lightweight champion, for an exhibition bout. Then he would show them what he could do. He would be making heaps of money and she would flaunt it in diamonds—a real diamond tiara—and silks and satins, like the donahs of the other great protagonists.

"I'd sooner you went and got an honest job, Curley," she said wearily.

At that he grew indignant. Fighting was as honest a trade as any. Wait till he got to Olympia and she sat watching him in the front row. And after they had dragged his insensible opponent off to the dressing-room, they would get into their motor and drive off to supper at the Troc.

He waxed enthusiastic over the prospect his imagination painted for him till, with a start, he sat up and saw she was almost asleep.

"I'm so tired, Curley, so tired," she said, her mouth drooping pathetically as a child's.

"All right, then I'd better be off," he said huffily.

She held up her face and he kissed her. But all his ardor could not put any warmth into her cold lips.

But when she got to her room, her sleepiness had fled. Her head hung heavy with thought. Curley had set her a serious riddle. Was she getting to think of the tall, grave, bearded man? Did he ever think of her? What had prompted him to his generosity? Was it some impulse of the moment, some fit of flashy boastfulness which he now secretly regretted?

He kept out of her way. In the workshop he scarcely ever gave her a glance. Two or three times she had looked down into the common-room of an evening, but she had never seen him there. And yet, in some nameless way, she was conscious that he was shadowing her, dogging her track. He was a man of mystery, capable of infusing mysteries into others. One of those mysteries was the way he had made her change to Curley.

Curley was now the same that he had always been, swaggering, overbearing, drunken. Perhaps she had liked him for that. She was by now sufficiently indigenous of the soil, had taken deep enough root in her surroundings, to

make her subscribe to the customs of the place, where on all sides she saw the women dominated, bullied, beaten by their menfolk—and proud of it.

So she had felt towards Curley, without feeling any deeper call—till this man had come. And with him he had brought long-effaced memories of that other life she had lived, memories of chivalrous men, of self-honoring homage, of service that ennobled the servitor. Such, as for instance, her father had given. No, she would not think of that. All that was washed away by her mother's ever-flowing tears.

And again she came back to her former question: did he give her a thought? For all his kindness to her she had an idea that he was looking over her head, beyond her—ignoring her. And at that a sudden rage seized her and her small fists beat a fierce tattoo on the unresponsive walls. Why had he put her out of conceit with Curley?

The weeks passed on, bringing no change, save the change that was registered in Sallie's heart. But that she kept to herself, giving, according to her habit of self-mastery, no inkling of it to Tiny, nor even to Curley who, with the philosophy of his class, was gradually accommodating his moods to hers. His contempt for the other sex held good, to the extent of considering her vagaries nothing more than the negligible antics of an inferior species. But one day there were developments at the workshop. Sir Clement had already noticed that Mr. Franks spent a good deal of his time in the neighborhood of Sallie. He had said nothing to her about it, perhaps so as not to alarm her, not knowing what she knew. In the afternoon Mr. Franks' voice was suddenly heard, pouring out a torrent of vituperation.

"Is that the way to cross-cut the sides? You're doing it

all crooked, you confounded hussy. Don't you see the line where the cut should go, you blinking mole?"

He was addressing Sallie.

"The cut's straight enough," she replied quietly.

"You're doing it all of a purpose, to ruin me. Why, you'll smash up the shop—you're enough to sink a ship with all the cargo. Out of the way, you rip, and let me show you how to do it."

He gave Sallie a violent push. Her head struck a projecting joist and her hand went up to it with a moan. A snigger ran round the workshop.

"Dad's got 'em again," said O'Hara.

Sir Clement had ceased work, looking and listening. On seeing Mr. Franks' brutality and Sallie's mishap, he walked quickly down the short staircase by which the front-shop gave on to the machinery room. When he got within arm's length of Mr. Franks—biff! His fist shot out, and down went Mr. Franks like a log, not quite knowing whether to yell: "Police—murder!" or to sham dead to save himself from another assault. Finally he decided on the latter.

A tense stillness held the place. Some one had shut off the electric motor and the gradual whirring down of the engine made it appear as if the world were coming to a stop.

"Put your hat on, Sallie."

Sallie did so instantly, Sir Clement donned his coat and they walked out of the shop.

They strode on in silence for a minute or two.

"Couldn't help it, Sallie—had to do it. Now I've lost you your job."

"Wouldn't worry about that, Tiny," she said readily. "Easy enough to get another one." She hesitated a mo-

ment and then went on: "Do you know what made him so ratty?"

"What, Sallie?"

"He'd been canoodling round me all the time. Asked me to come out with him. Offered me money. I wasn't slow to tell him what I thought. But to-night he wanted me to stay behind when all the others were gone. Mrs. Franks had left this morning for the seaside with the kids. I smacked his face."

Sir Clement had come to a halt. Then he swung round again. She caught him by the arm.

"What are you going to do?"

"Go back and give him another one—under the ear this time."

"What, and kill another man?"

He paused as if he had received a blow.

"Child, you shouldn't have said that," came from him after a silence.

"Don't care. I'm not good enough to hang for. D'you know, there's twenty-six hours' pay due to us," she added inconsequently.

"We'll ask Tim to get it."

"And I don't think old Franks'll make any bones about handing it over."

There was another pause. Then her hand stole timidly into his.

"I'm sorry I said what I said before, Tiny," she whispered.

"No harm, no harm," he reassured her. And indeed the stab was not as deep as he had been afraid. He asked her suddenly: "Been to the cemetery lately?"

"Not for a week or so," she said awkwardly. "I—I'm not comfortable there."

"Not comfortable, Sallie?"

He did not invite confidences. So why should she tell him that the plain deal board on the grave cried out to her as a dereliction of duty?

"Will you come with me now?" he asked.

When they got there she saw why he had brought her. As in a trance she stood running her fingers over the gilt lettering of the massive stone. She remembered his asking her mother's Christian name and age. But again she did not thank him. All she said was:

"I'll have to live a long time, Tiny."

"That's all right, Sallie. But you won't be uncomfortable any more, will you?"

She stared at him in terror. To her other emotions there had added itself that of fear. This uncanny man could read her thoughts. But, oh, when would he begin to read her heart?

CHAPTER IV

AN IDYLL OF THE TOWN

SIR CLEMENT, otherwise Mr. Black, otherwise Derek Skene, stood in the common-room, waiting for Sallie. Presently she came down.

"Just going off to look for a job," he told her.

"I'm going with you."

"Come along."

But she hung back and stood looking up at him with an air of arch deprecation.

"Oh, Tiny, must we do it now?"

"I thought the sooner the better."

"There's no hurry for a day. We'll go to-morrow. Let's take to-day off."

"Just as you please. I don't mind." And he turned to go.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Tiny. I mean, let's take it off together."

"Eh, what?" he asked, startled.

"Oh, Tiny, be a sport. We'll make a day of it. Take me out somewhere."

"Certainly not."

"Oh, why not, Tiny?" she pleaded with a pout. "I never go anywhere. It's nothing but work, work all the time. I've got the hump—that high."

"What about Curley? He's kicking up enough of a shindy as it is."

"Curley can go too . . ." she began vehemently.

"No, Sallie, we won't have that language," he said with

a protesting hand. "I don't want any rows with Curley for myself. And I don't want you to have any either. He's your young man, isn't he?"

"I'll look after myself, Tiny, I promise you." And then she came and rubbed her cheek against his arm with a sort of ingratiating pertness—the action had the prettiness of a young kitten's.

"Oh, Tiny, I've been dreaming about it all night. Look how the sun is shining. It would be so nice to wander round the town—up west. No, I don't care about the country. I long to see the pretty dresses and the carriages. Come on, Tiny, I'd be so much obliged to you. And if you can't afford it—I'll stand the exes."

He was wavering, under the impact of a great compassion, but he still had his doubts.

"I don't want to make things unpleasant for you, little girl. It may lead to trouble."

"No, it won't, Tiny," she said eagerly, seeing that she was in a fair way of gaining her point. "Curley needn't even know. He never comes till the evening and then he'll think I've gone to bed. Do come, Tiny. Unless you're afraid for yourself."

That decided him.

"All right, Sallie, we'll go. He'd be loony if he saw any harm in such an innocent little outing."

"Hurrah!" she shouted.

"Wait a minute," said Sir Clement, pondering. "Now where shall we go first? How about the National Gallery?"

"Oh, let's make it the pit and do it in style," she cried. "My money will stretch to the pit."

"I mean the big picture-place, Sallie," he smiled.

She was about to iterate her objection to Charlie Chaplin's up-turned boots, when it suddenly dawned on her that

she was making a fool of herself. She hung her head shamefacedly.

"I ought to have remembered. Please don't laugh at me."

"No, child, I'm not laughing. Now run off and get ready."

"All right. And Curley can go to hell! There, I've said it after all," she cried with a happy little trill of mischievous mirth as she disappeared.

He spent the interval in serious reflection. He ought not to have met her suggestion by making difficulties. This was playing into his hands. In fact, he had perhaps been delaying too long. He had done nothing for his scheme of raising Sallie from her present low plane to a higher status. Unconsciously, perhaps, he had felt himself hampered by Curley. What was to be done with Curley?

He might take Sallie away at once, but could he do that without having, in some degree, made her worthy of standing by the side of her sister? For all the natural cry of the blood, Hazel would perhaps not thank him for springing on her this slum-child of whom she would have to be ashamed. And not only for Hazel's sake, but for Sallie's own. It would be easier for her to take a firm footing on the new level if she came there, having stripped herself of at least the more outward traces of these degrading years. Yes, this day should start Sallie's education.

A few minutes later she was down again, having donned all her tawdry finery, which yet made her look natty and gave tokens of good taste. And many a king's daughter would have envied her for her youth and beauty as she tripped daintily along. They boarded a bus for Charing Cross. Sallie was chattering like a magpie all the time and her happy, almost arrogantly happy, laugh rang out and stabbed him to the quick by the remembrance of the

tribulations and hardships that had gone to the making of it. No one could laugh like that for sheer joy but one who had seen much sorrow in her life.

They walked up the steps of the dingy but noble edifice that was their first objective and suddenly Sallie clapped her hands.

"Oh, I remember now. I've been here—years and years ago. I lost my parasol here. I wonder if I shall find it."

He saw in it a sign of awakening interest and was pleased. He took her first to a room of which he had always had the most vivid recollections. She looked at the paintings with a puzzled air.

"Why, they're all blobs and splashes," she remarked.

"That's Turner—the greatest English painter, as some people think," he informed her. "Unfortunately he did not know how to mix his colors."

"Well, perhaps he knew better how to mix his drinks," she cried with boisterous good humor.

He smiled at the curious appositeness of her haphazard words as he thought of the great Bohemian's periodic Saturnalia round Wapping Stairs.

Then they went to the Italian masters, who seemed to hold her attention better. They stood before a Tintoretto.

"Are those supposed to be angels?" she asked.

"Yes, Sallie, according to their notions."

"Gracious! Haven't they got fat little tummies!"

After a little while she became rather bored and restive, and at last she exclaimed:

"Oh, do let's get out into the sunshine—it's so stuffy here."

He gave in to her immediately, thinking that for a first lesson in estheticism it had been long enough. They entered a Lyons for lunch. Wherever they had gone he had noticed the glances of amazed admiration that had followed

her. He saw also the gay spontaneity with which she had answered them, smiling back at the people with the frankness of a child. Yes, frank, spontaneous—but under that unconscious exterior he sensed the rush and stir of awakening womanhood.

After lunch they made their way to the Park and he led her to the Serpentine. There they hired a boat. Her delight, as they glided over the glassy smoothness of the water, exceeded her powers of expression. She sat almost silent, her eyes riveted on him, seemingly fascinated by his skillful oarsmanship, the cleanness of his stroke, the rhythmic swing of his great shoulders. To her view he handled the boat with the ease of a boy flying a toy balloon. She thought it was a jealous irony of Curley to have nicknamed him Tiny. It was the first time during the day that Curley had entered her mind.

Then she took it into her head that she must try her hand at rowing. The exchange of seats was safely effected by the bank of an island. Her efforts were hopeless. She caught innumerable crabs and several times came near to capsizing the boat. At last one of the oars slipped from her hand and floated merrily away, being at length fished up by a passing sculler who restored it to her with an audible gasp as he looked at her.

Then she had enough of it and they landed and took their way to the Row, where they sat down on the penny chairs. The afternoon Parade was just beginning. The splendid equipages, horsed and unhorsed, rolled by in an ever-lengthening line, and all at once there was a general rising and a respectful lifting of hats.

"The Queen, wasn't it?" she asked in an awed whisper.

He nodded. He was pleased at her intelligence, or was it a memory? Apparently the latter, for suddenly she bent her mouth confidentially to his ear.

"Do you know I used to drive here once?"

"Oh, did you, when?" he asked, feigning ignorance.

"Oh, with my mother, when she used to take out those rich people's children."

"What was their name?"

But she shook her head, curling up into herself again. She had told him too much already. He saw this was his cue and seized upon it.

"Wouldn't you like to drive in the Row again, Sallie?"

"Oh, not at all," she replied quickly.

"You wouldn't? Why not?"

"I'm all right where I am, Tiny."

"But wouldn't you like something better?"

"What's there better?" she asked half defiantly. "There's nothing to worry me. I work when I like and starve when I like. I'm as free as the air, with nobody to put his spoke into me. Why, it's a splendid life!"

"A splendid life!" he echoed, shocked. "Sallie, doesn't it ever occur to you that there's a world beyond Paradise Lane—this world," and he swung his arm round comprehensively. "I don't mean exactly carriages and queens, but a world where there's no filth or foulness, where you can use your eyes and ears without getting them hurt at every turn."

"But they're not hurt," she replied astonished. "What makes you say that, Tiny? Why, everything is just as it should be. I don't see anything wrong with it whatever."

This was a poser for him. He had no idea, and it filled him with alarm, that the dreadful past had eaten so deeply into her soul. Perhaps for her too he had come too late, her body living, but her higher self dead. Yet there and then he made up his mind not to relax the struggle, to return to it again and again, till he had scraped off some of

the indurated crust and the obsolete instincts had a chance of asserting themselves once more.

"No, Sallie," he remarked earnestly, "you only say that because you have forgotten. Surely you know that there are beautiful things that never come through to the underworld in which we are burrowing. You have only to be reminded of them. It won't take much to make them come back to you. Just give a little thought to it and you will see what I mean."

"Why do you talk to me like this?" she asked tremulously.

"Because I feel a pleasure in it—not to say a duty. Sallie, I want to lift you out of yourself, out of the mire in which you are dabbling without even seeing that you are getting your fingers dirty."

"But why, why?" she quavered. "Have you any reason?"

"I have a reason." She had compelled him to the admission.

"Then tell me what it is," she demanded, almost imperiously.

"No, Sallie, I can't do that. Not now."

"But will you ever tell me?" Her heart seemed to quiver in the question.

"Yes, when you have done what I want you to do, when you are ready. No, don't ask any more."

She pressed her hand to her breast to stay the delicious turmoil within. And she laughed to herself. This superman, as he appeared to her, great and splendid though he was, what a dear booby he was after all. As if she did not guess what he meant! By such transparently subtle maneuverings he wanted to get her ready—for whom but for himself? He wanted to test her, to see whether she was capable of mounting to his own level. She had known

all along how immeasurably he towered above her. She had long ago given up trying to ferret out the mystery of him. He was good enough for her as she found him. And then, when she had raised herself a little more to his height, he would tell her that she was good enough for him. What a wonderful idea—what a wonderful man!

So their thoughts ran on in cross-currents, billowing on towards the tragic clash.

"I'll try, Tiny," she said with a fluttering breath.

"That's good, Sallie, and I'll help you," he told her, patting her hand approvingly. "I'll tell you what to do."

Suddenly she uttered a little cry of alarm.

"Oh, but what about Curley? He won't like it."

He wrinkled his brows. He had already asked himself the question. He knew that sooner or later it would have to be answered. Very well, then let it be the sooner. How could she help remaining Sallie while retaining Curley?

"You'll have to drop him. I don't see any other way. Will you mind?"

"Mind?" she cried scornfully. "I'm sure I'll be better off without him."

"But you mustn't get rid of him all at once. You must use tact. Anyway, you can move away from Paradise Lane."

"That's no good, Tiny," she said quickly. "He'll come after me and find me. He'll hang about the cemetery. He knows I must come there sometimes."

"Yes, I suppose he would make it unpleasant for you," he said thoughtfully. "Couldn't the police give you protection?"

"Lord, that would be the worst thing to do, to put him up against the police. It would make him more desperate than ever."

"Then you'd better stay where you are," he said, feeling helpless.

She had become very subdued. Her thoughts seemed to run darkly. And presently he saw something like a shudder passing through her frame.

"Do you know, Tiny," she said at last, "I'm afraid I'll never be finished with Curley. There's a kind of feeling hanging over me that my life is bound up with his for good or ill and I've no idea what the end will be."

He put his arm upon her protectively. He saw she was getting into a dangerous mood and he must check it.

"Oh, buck up, Sallie. This is against the bargain. You haven't come out to make yourself miserable."

She was up with a spring.

"Yes, let's be happy, if only for to-day."

They went and had tea. He noticed that Sallie did not eat heartily. The shadow of Curley—or was it something else?—was still upon her, but gradually she brightened up again and presently she was her cheery insouciant self again. All their outlay Sallie had defrayed so far. He had submitted to it smilingly, careful not to damp the childish pleasure it gave her. And then they walked about, looking at the shops, at least Sallie did, till it got to half past seven.

"And now, Sallie, you'll have to stand down. It's my shout," he said.

"Where are you going to take me—to the Alhambra?"

"No, Sallie, somewhere better."

He took her to Covent Garden and got seats in the amphitheater. Their style of dress, he thought, hardly fitted them for a better place. Sallie looked round the magnificent house in wide-eyed wonder.

"What are we going to see, Tiny?"

"Hear, Sallie," he corrected her. "Opera—they are playing 'Aida.'"

The information conveyed very little to her, but she awaited the opening in great contentment. Soon, however, she began to fidget. The performance did not seem to interest her. She kept looking into the boxes, though they showed her little more than a coruscation of diamonds. Sir Clement felt that his first experiment in this direction was not a success. However, he told her the plot and she plucked up a little more interest. The barbaric splendor of some of the settings fascinated her, and at the brazen blare of the vulgar big chorus she caught his hand and he felt hers thrill with delight. After that she became rather lethargic again. At the wonderful tomb scene she yawned undisguisedly.

"Don't you like music, Sallie?" he asked her as they made their way out.

"Oh, I do. I think the jazz band in Victoria Park is lovely."

And he had to let it go at that.

"Oh, Tiny, it's been a wonderful day," she murmured on the bus.

"Has it? So glad. Now, Sallie, you'll do what I want, won't you?"

"Eh? Oh, yes," she replied, evidently having to tax her memory for the reference.

"You must start reading. Not 'Bow Bells Novelettes,' but some good books. I'll get them for you."

"Right-oh, Tiny. I'll read 'em."

At the entrance to the lodging-house they ran straight into Curley's arms. He had apparently been waiting for them. Now the tempest would break. Sir Clement was not sorry—it would be as well to make the first breach.

But the unexpected happened. Curley came up to him in the most possible good humor.

"Hullo, Tiny, been takin' my little gal out? Good of you. Just what she wants. Had a good time?"

"Oh, so so," said Sallie quickly, as if to prevent Sir Clement from breaking in with an answer.

"That's right, old gal. You wants a bit o' takin' out o' yourself. You're gettin' fed up with the blue devils. Say, Tiny, come and have a tiddley? We can slip in through the side-door."

"Not to-night, Curley. Too late for me."

"No? Well, then, I owe you one. Good night, the both o' yous."

Sir Clement felt as if he had been left suspended in mid-air and Sallie had also become very pensive. They walked inside, past the now almost silent common-room and up-stairs to the dark corridor.

"What's the matter with Curley?" she asked as they came to halt, about to part.

"Oh, just a change of front. He thinks it'll pay better. Good night, Sallie."

And at that moment he suddenly felt a pair of soft arms round his neck and warm lips on his mouth.

"Oh, thank you, Tiny, ever so much. It was lovely," he heard her whisper.

He unwound her arms and gripped her firmly by the elbows.

"Yes, that's all right, Sallie, but you must never do this again."

"Mustn't I, Tiny? Shy, are you? I bet you've been kissed once or twice before," she said gayly.

"It isn't right, Sallie. Not if you're going to start being a lady."

"Oh, don't get cross," she said more soberly. "I'm only a little girl."

"Yes, young enough to be my daughter."

"Oh, no, no, Tiny, you mustn't say that. You're not a bit old."

"We won't discuss it."

"You won't frighten me by growling, you bear," she said, her good spirits having got the upper hand again. "And I don't care what you do. You'll never be able to rub that kiss off."

And with a mischievous laugh she fled to her room.

Sir Clement went to his, very thoughtful. Yes, this time she had said "Thank you," but this time he was not at all sure that he had rendered her a service.

He had not, however, yet finished with her for that night. A few minutes later he heard her tap timidly at his door. He went and opened to her. She stood there, a lighted candle in one hand, a tattered album, a relic of better days, in the other.

"What is it, Sallie?" he asked gently.

"Oh, I'm so glad. I was afraid you'd gobble me up. Tiny, if it's not asking you too much, would you mind writing some good words in this for me? Don't look at the other pages."

"Of course I'll write you something," he said kindly.

And he sat down and wrote:

> "Would you choose for your life a motto and plan?
> Here's a golden rule which never let rust:
> Be a child, dear child, as long as you can—
> Be a woman as soon as you must."

"Did you make that up out of your own head?" she asked, reading it over with shining eyes.

"Guilty, Sallie, I'm afraid," he laughed.

She made no comment, but took up the pen and added, in a refined hand:

"Date—a happy day."

Then she walked out, the candle-light falling on the open page, her lips moving silently. She was evidently memorizing the lines.

CHAPTER V

THE DANGLING OF AMBROSE

It was a month later, and Jocelyn stood in Kenneth Hobhouse's sanctum, flushed with wrath as to his pretty countenance.

"I demand it—I demand it instantly!" he shouted. "The fellow is to be dismissed this minute for his unpardonable insolence."

"What have you to say to this, Crane?" asked Kenneth of Waggles, who stood at the door, twirling his cap, a furtive grin lurking in the corners of his wizened mouth.

"I was simply obeying Sir Clement's orders, sir. Before Sir Clement went he told me that no one was to shoot in the preserves. And when Mr. Jocelyn . . ."

"Surely the prohibition does not apply to me. Clem couldn't have meant it," cried Jocelyn.

"Clem usually means what he says to include everybody," Ken remarked quietly.

"I don't believe it. In fact, when Clem isn't here I as good as take his place."

"You've tried it, Joss, and I've given you your head as long as no principle was involved."

"Principle be hanged. Crane insulted me and I want him to get the sack. He had the impertinence to wrest the gun from my hands. No shooting on the estate? What next? It isn't close-time."

"It's close-time whenever Clem wants it to be."

"Are you going to sack the fellow?" persisted Jocelyn.

"Crane, how long have you been here?"

"Man and boy, forty-eight years, sir."

"You see, Joss," said Kenneth, turning to him argumentatively, "the thing is absurd."

"I don't care if he's been here Methuselah's years. If you won't send him packing, I will."

"Only Clem can do that, Joss."

"Well, then, where is Clem? Where is he hiding? Why don't you produce him?"

"You talk as if I kept him in my waistcoat pocket," smiled Kenneth.

"Fine doings!" jeered Jocelyn. "He's hardly got warm in the place when he sneaks off to some hole to bury himself in. Deuce only knows what he's got to be afraid of."

"Joss, you'd better be careful of your tongue. You're saying things you'll be sorry for. What makes you think Clem has reason to be afraid of anything?"

"I know, I know," came angrily from Jocelyn. "He's playing some underhand game. Those mysterious friends from Africa don't come to inquire after his health."

"Friends from Africa? Joss, you've got the measles, or else you're cutting your wisdom teeth. Don't make poor Waggles think he's serving under a monster of iniquity."

"Well, I tell you I'm going to shoot over those covers if the world comes to an end," cried Jocelyn, rushing out and shutting the door with great violence.

"And if you do," said Kenneth, opening it and calling after him, "as sure as it won't come to an end, I'll have you arrested for poaching."

Jocelyn tore off to the ivy-clad cottage where he was sure his wounded feelings would find balm. He found Hazel and Tabitha at lunch. He at once came out with his dreadful story.

"But, Jocelyn, dear, Crane couldn't go against Sir Clement's orders," remonstrated Hazel.

"And Mr. Hobhouse was perfectly right in supporting him," joined in Tabitha.

"Oh, that's right. Now you all come into the conspiracy against me. Well, it's just as well to know who's your friend and who isn't."

"You know I'm your friend, Jocelyn," said Hazel earnestly.

"But you never admit that I'm right."

"Not when you're wrong."

He threw his hat into a corner and plumped into a seat. Then he flung out the question.

"I say, Miss Witherspoon, where is Sir Clement?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," she replied instantly.

"Oh, come, come, you have," he said, wheedling. "You and he always had your heads together. I'm sure he told you before he went."

"If he did, I should respect his confidence."

"Well, the plot is thickening. I've half a mind to put the police on to it."

"Jocelyn!" Hazel cried aghast.

"Well, unless he's up to some mischief he doesn't want anybody to know about, it may be a case of lost memory. Or he may have been kidnaped."

"What, Sir Clement?" smiled Hazel.

The smile riled Jocelyn.

"Don't you think it possible? It's happened to better men."

"But, Jocelyn, when he knew he was going, when he came to say good-by to us?"

"Did he? Well, that's the first I hear of it."

"You said yourself he had become very friendly with Tabitha."

"But not with you?"

"Yes, with me too," she said with pensive frankness. "I like him better than I did."

"Why not go the whole hog and say you've fallen in love with him?"

"How can you be so absurd?" she cried with a vexed flush.

Miss Witherspoon had quitted the room, partly to leave them tête-à-tête, but more because she was terribly angry with Jocelyn. To suggest stupidity, or an unworthy motive, for Sir Clement's going, when she knew so much better. True, all this time he had not given a sign of life, had made no report of progress, but she had implicit trust in him.

"Jocelyn," said Hazel after a pause, "I also would like to know what has become of Sir Clement."

"So you share my anxiety."

She ignored his sarcasm.

"I want to see him," she went on steadily.

"He'd feel flattered." And then he was seized with a sudden uneasiness. "What do you want to see him about?"

She turned away from him and her words seemed addressed more to herself than to him.

"It's all so unsatisfactory. Everything looks so far off, so—so nebulous." She faced him again. "When shall we ever get on to firm ground, Jocelyn? You've been forwards and backwards to town now for nearly three months and you still haven't found anything to suit you."

"But consider, my dear girl," he said with a superior air, "the kind of job I'm after doesn't grow on trees."

"Then don't look at the trees. Look on the ground Jocelyn."

He drew himself up haughtily.

"You forget I'm a gentleman, Hazel."

"No, I'm remembering it," she said with a curious in-

tonation—was there a touch of scorn in it? "And since you're not forgetting it yourself, it must be clear to you that I have the right to look to you, sooner or later, to provide a home for me."

"Go on, nag away. But where does Clem come in?"

"I've been considering it. There's nothing left for me. I'm thinking that perhaps you didn't handle the matter rightly."

"What matter?"

"About your going abroad. Or even about his helping you to find a job here. I may be able to put it to him in a different light. Perhaps he'll take another view—if he knows what is at stake."

"Oh, don't do that!" he cried in quick consternation.

"Why shouldn't I, Jocelyn?"

"Quite enough that he snubbed me. No need for us both to be humiliated."

"I wouldn't look on it as a humiliation. And I don't think he'll snub me."

"You must have a wonderful pull on him."

"I haven't any. But, hit or miss, I ought to try."

"Don't risk it. I don't want you to risk it. In fact, I forbid it."

"Oh, very well," she said with a catch in her voice. "After all, it's your business. I promise you I shall never again interfere in your affairs."

"But my affairs are yours, aren't they?"

"You have just refused me that privilege."

"You're perfectly unreasonable!" he flared up.

"I know I am. Always thinking of my petty self. Never giving a thought to you. Well, Jocelyn, perhaps I really will start thinking of myself."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know that I mean anything."

"Then give up that irritating habit of talking through your hat."

He got up and walked about the room, muttering and grumbling to himself. As she watched him, a feeling came over her that she was really old enough to be his mother. At that moment Tabitha reëntered.

"Hazel, we must get back to school. Ten to two."

"I'm ready, Tab."

The three left the cottage together. When they had walked a few yards, Jocelyn said suddenly:

"Well, so long. I've got to go down to the post office."

And he went, striking off in the opposite direction.

"Has it ever occurred to you that Jocelyn never cares to walk through the village with us?" said Miss Witherspoon. "Is he by any chance a snob?"

Tabitha made the suggestion with some trepidation, expecting Hazel to jump down her throat. But Hazel did not jump. She only smiled a little sadly.

"Look who's coming!" whispered Tabitha, giving Hazel a quick little nudge.

Who? None other than the puissant Miss Clavering, accompanied by the Rev. Ambrose Fotheringham. They passed each other with the most perfunctory of bows.

"Isn't that the little schoolmistress who sings in the choir?" asked the Rev. Ambrose, in a tone of mild indifference.

"What of it?" said Miss Clavering sharply.

"Oh—oh, only a mnemonic test. I'm trying to cultivate a memory for faces."

"If you cultivate the face of every little minx we pass, we'll never get home. We're late for lunch as it is."

It was a stiff, formal affair this lunch, but the Rev. Ambrose enjoyed it thoroughly, formality being his element.

"And is the great work progressing satisfactorily?" he inquired.

"Oh, exceedingly so," replied Mr. Hobhouse, spread-eagling his finger-tips together and munching. "I've got as far as the Book of Judith. I have discovered in it some most illuminating points."

He was about to enlarge on them, but Mrs. Hobhouse thought differently.

"Waste of time!" she snorted. "I would like to know what is the good of writing a book with such a title. I wouldn't even be able to ask our friends to buy it because I should never remember the name. Why not write a book that everybody could understand? I've given you a theme, Robert, but you never, of course, will do as you're told. 'Bible Babblings for the Bairns,'—don't you think such a book would be very popular, Mr. Fotheringham?"

"Immensely! An excellent subject!" cried the Rev. Ambrose with enthusiasm. "I wish I had hit on the idea myself."

"You can have the idea," said Mrs. Hobhouse generously. "It seems to be my fate to go through the world providing people with ideas."

"Oh, thank you. At the same time, my dear lady, Mr. Hobhouse is writing a really epoch-making book, a monument to English scholarship."

"I don't care. Others can build its monuments. What I complain of, Robert, is that this habit of scribbling is having a detrimental effect on your highest obligations."

"My dear Evelyn!"

"Oh, we needn't mind Mr. Fotheringham. Among our chief obligations is to avoid making mistakes. Last night at the Weatherlys', I am told, you several times trumped your partner's best card and revoked twice."

"That is unfortunately true," admitted the wretched man.

"I hope it won't occur when I'm your partner."

"No, Evelyn, dear, I hope not."

"You forget, Mrs. Hobhouse, that when a man's predilections are centered on some particular object of interest," began Mr. Fotheringham, throwing a melting glance at Josephine, who turned her head and looked through the window.

When the two ladies had retired to the other room, said Josephine to her mother:

"He's going to do it again. I can see it in his eye. That'll be the fifth time."

"He's such an elusive man," said Mrs. Hobhouse impatiently.

"Who—Amby?"

"Dear me, no. Sir Clement. I can't find out what has become of him. But I expect he's had a checkered career and is busy tying up the loose ends of his rather tangled life. I think that nothing irretrievable should be done till he comes back."

"But what am I to do with Amby meanwhile?"

"Dangle him, dear Josephine, dangle him."

Presently the Rev. Ambrose followed them and Josephine took him into the garden to be dangled.

"Miss Josephine, will you give me leave to broach again a subject of the utmost importance to me?"

"Go on. It's about due."

"I hope I'm not wearying you by my periodic repetition," he said, looking a little pained.

"Not at all. I'm getting used to it."

"I am glad to know that there is at least something about me that you have come to regard in the light of a familiar habit."

"I certainly have, my dear Ambrose."

"My dear Ambrose!" His manner was ecstatic. "Miss Josephine, have I heard you aright?"

"If you've been listening attentively, I presume you have. And if you like you may drop the 'miss' and call me just Josephine. It won't make me think so much that the housemaid is addressing me."

"But that's really a wonderful concession—Josephine!"

"Something for a start."

"Then you are not yet prepared to give me everything?" he asked, woebegone.

"Not yet, Ambrose. In a matter like this the heart must speak loudly and unequivocally, must it not?"

"Mine is speaking loudly enough, Josephine."

"And mine, I think, is just beginning to whisper."

And she extended to him a limp white hand upon which he impressed a chaste though rapturous salute.

"And now we've got that over, I'll go in and rest. Emotional ordeals such as this always take it out of me," said Josephine.

"I have a commission for you, Mr. Fotheringham," said Mrs. Hobhouse, as the young cleric was making his departure.

"Which I shall be honored to execute."

"I think you are interested in Sir Clement's return."

"I am," he assented quickly, his eye on the prospective vicarage Josephine was to grace.

"Well, we're not exactly on the best of terms with Ken. So perhaps you could make it your business to call at the Priory and ascertain from him, as diplomatically as possible, of course, when the truant is likely to come back."

"I shall do so with pleasure," said the Rev. Ambrose. And he went away, joyous at this proof of Mrs. Hobhouse's confidence in his tact, not dreaming that he was being made a cat's-paw for his own eventual undoing.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTRUSION OF SALLIE

AND so it came that the Rev. Ambrose, one of the least important figures in this history, was the first to set eyes on Sir Clement on his unexpected return. He met him at the bottom of the Grange, but, to his dismay, Sir Clement passed him with a curt nod, almost a scowl. He did not know that it had come upon Sir Clement at that moment that it was this man he had to thank for his first real poignant stab at his conscience. But almost in the same breath Sir Clement saw the unfairness, the puerility of the thought. His conscience was what he had made of it himself. It could hardly become a more tattered thing from any outside laceration.

"Mr. Fotheringham!" he called.

The Rev. Ambrose turned with a flutter of expectancy.

"About the Woodbridge living. I understand that the parishioners are anxious to keep Mr. Hall with them a little longer, despite his age. So perhaps he won't go out of harness just yet. But when he retires, I shall keep you in mind. I have not forgotten your eloquent sermon."

And then he went on, cutting short the Rev. Ambrose's protestations of gratitude.

There were several reasons that had combined for his abrupt return. First, there was Charley, who was due to-day or to-morrow. It was not advisable that anybody should see him except himself, not even Ken, to whom he had not even left any instructions on the matter. Then there was Ken himself. It was not fair to leave the whole

burden of the estate on his shoulders. Ken had the address to which he might write in an emergency, but he knew Ken well enough that he would not write, preferring to struggle with his difficulties unaided rather than interfere with Sir Clement's movements.

And lastly there was Sallie, perhaps the most important of the three. This last month had, as far as it seemed, set her on the right road. She did all he wanted her to do. Curley had left her in peace, never showing up at Number 7. He had waylaid her once or twice, she had told him, but it had been quite a well-behaved, an almost humble Curley. He had begged her not to chuck him, but to wait. He was out for a big thing and she would be satisfied. Sallie, bearing in mind Tiny's advice, had given a non-committal answer. Sir Clement wondered what Curley's big thing might be. It was certainly nothing in the boxing line. That, however, was Curley's business, to be disposed of with a shrug. As long as Curley did not make himself a nuisance to Sallie, he might pass.

But what was not so easily disposed of was Sallie's attitude to himself. It bothered him. She had not again shown herself demonstrative, she had, in fact, become reticent, aloof. But from her whole manner there spoke a proud, silent wistfulness. She seemed to be waiting for a sign from him, a sign he knew he could never give her. Her patient submissiveness had begun to hurt him. He imagined that it could be nothing but calf-love, seeing the difference in their years—he calculated he must be nearly twice her age. The only remedy he could think of was a period of separation to drive the foolish fancy from her mind. And from her almost stoic demeanor this morning, as he bade her good-by, he deduced that the treatment was happily, not as drastic as he had thought.

A few minutes later he came upon Ken.

"Hullo, Clem," laughed Ken. "I had an idea you would drop from the clouds like this."

"How are things, Ken?"

"First rate. Only Jocelyn getting a bit out of hand."

"We'll soon straighten that out. I say, Ken, has a fellow called Dallas been here to-day?"

"What, Will Dallas?"

"No, Charley, his brother."

"Nobody, Clem."

"Oh, all right."

They sat talking for some time about things and then Sir Clement rose.

"I'm just going to have a look round. No, you needn't come. If Dallas shows up, ask him to wait."

Ken remained behind, thinking. Charley Dallas, Will's brother, what had he to do here? Then suddenly he remembered Jocelyn's reference to mysterious friends from Africa. There was evidently more in Clem's connection with the Dallases than he had let out, more than was perhaps good for him. It might want looking into. He did not know that his idea would be realized sooner than he expected. He pondered on the matter a little longer and then went about his work.

Sir Clement walked out into the grounds, thrilling with a strange ecstasy to know himself so near her again. But he refused to dwell on it. He knew it meant a painful analysis, and he might very well delay putting his heart on the dissecting table. As he drew near the covers, the silence was all at once broken by screams, not so much of pain or fear, as of indignation. He hurried through the trees and in the distance he saw Waggles struggling with a girl.

A horrid presentiment brought a laboring into his breath. He thought of the queer sensation that had obsessed him

all during the journey in the train. Keen eyes seemed to have been piercing the wooden walls of the compartments, searching for him. When he had got out at the station he had momentarily forgotten to look round to see if there were any possible justification for his strange fancy.

But he had verified it now. Long before he came up to them he knew it was Sallie.

"Oh, Sir Clement, so pleased to see you," panted Waggles, still keeping a tight hold on his captive. "I found this young person skulking about the grounds. I want to put her out, but she refuses to leave."

"It's all right, Waggles, let her go."

"Oh, if you say so, Sir Clement, of course."

"I'll talk to her, Waggles."

And Waggles, taking the hint, made off, chuckling to himself. He was glad to see his master back, and still more glad to note in him this human touch. Even the austere Sir Clement could not be blamed for falling a victim to such a pretty bit of skirt.

They waited till Waggles was well out of ear-shot.

"What's the meaning of this, Sallie?" Sir Clement asked angrily.

She stared at the ground, defiantly.

"I didn't want you to know. Never thought you'd catch me. If that old fool hadn't hung on to me . . ."

He looked at his watch.

"That's all right, Sallie. There's a train back in an hour's time. If you keep along that path to the left, it will bring you straight to the station."

"Thank you. There's a way to treat a fellow," she said sullenly.

"You can't expect any other treatment. You did a most indiscreet thing. You had no right to let your curiosity run away with you like that."

"But I've found out, haven't I?" she said, tossing her head. "You'd never have told me. Sir Clement! So that's who we are. I always knew you were a swell, but I never thought you had a handle to your name. Does all this belong to you?"

He stood irresolute.

An agonizing conflict had risen up in him. Here she was, within a stone's throw of her sister. Was it for that that providence had played her cards so trickily? Was he meant to act on it? He thrust the notion away. No, the time was not yet. He must not allow circumstances to force his hand. This was an accident which should count for nothing. He had mapped out his time-chart for Sallie and must not depart from it. She was doing very well. To precipitate matters would be to jeopardize the happiness of both sisters, perhaps beyond remedy.

"Sallie," he said, "I'll run up to-morrow and we'll talk it over."

"Yes, and then you'll go away again."

"I can't stay all the time in Paradise Lane."

"You must have been mad to come there at all."

"There was method in my madness. I had a duty to perform."

"For all I care, you needn't go back there at all. I'm not going back."

"No? What do you propose to do?"

"Stay with you here."

"What, here?"

"Here—anywhere, as long as it's with you," she said, lifting to him her brimming eyes.

"Sallie, you're out of your mind," he said, a dread becoming alive in him that this was to be a struggle which would force him to fight with very cruel weapons.

"I'm not," she said stubbornly.

"You are making a most preposterous demand. You know very well yourself that it can't be carried out," he said sternly.

"I don't know anything," she whimpered. "I only know that when you told me this morning you were going away and weren't sure when I would see you again, I heard my heart go crack."

"How did you get here?" he asked suddenly.

"I followed you. Got into the same bus, you outside, I in. It never occurred to you to look—that's how much you had me in your mind. And then I hung about the house you went in up west, and when you got into a taxi, I got into another. And at the station I took a platform ticket and slipped into the same train with you. Thank goodness I had the fare—I didn't know what I was saving up for."

He listened to those spurting sentences with an aching heart. Then he touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Well, Sallie, now that you've got to know what you wanted to know, let it be enough for you. You have found out that I am Sir Clement Barradine, and you had better take the secret back with you to Paradise Lane. You won't always be staying there. One of these days—soon, I hope, I shall come and take you away from there."

"But I'm ready now, Tiny. I'm ready to go with you anywhere you like. And, oh, Tiny!"—she flung her arms towards him with a gesture of utter self-abandonment—"I'll be to you anything you want me to be!"

He started back, utterly shocked. He had no idea that he had taken such a hold on her, that she was prepared to make for him the supremest sacrifice a woman can make. But if that were so, he would take advantage of his strength.

"Listen, Sallie, and I'll tell you something that no living

being knows. I can't be anything to you, and you can't be anything to me, because I love some one else."

"Love some one else!" she echoed, dazed.

"I've given her all the love I'm capable of, and she doesn't give me any back, but I've got to keep on loving her all the same."

"What, she won't have you?" she cried, almost savagely.

"It isn't her fault. She doesn't know of it. Not that, if she did, it would make any difference. But, for her sake, I must be honest to myself. And, for your sake, Sallie, I must be honest to you. Good God, I can't do what you want me to do. I can't degrade you into being a toy, a plaything. Whatever else may or may not be, we respect each other, Sallie. Let us look on that as a precious, a holy possession not to be defiled. Remember that, my girl. I can't tell you anything more now, but I want you to know that I am reserving you for some great joy in your life."

She shook her head dully, obstinately.

"I don't understand anything of that. I only want to ask you, Tiny—don't you care for me at all?"

"I care for you a great deal, a very great deal. You don't know what your happiness means for me. The task I have undertaken is great. With the help of God I hope I shall bring it to a good finish. Only you must help as well."

A strange look had come into her eyes, a look that mingled cunning and despair with a grim resolve.

"And would it hurt you, Tiny, if anything were to happen to me?"

"I should suffer terribly."

Eyes averted, she continued to build up that secret purpose of hers.

"And is there no hope for me, Tiny, are you sure there isn't any hope for me?"

"There is every hope for you, child. You are young, and all youth is just one great glad song to hope. You will look back on this as a dark, a foolish dream. The day will come when you will thank me for having stood up to you as your better self."

"And there's really no hope for me, not in the way I mean?" she asked again, and her voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"No, Sallie. And bless God there isn't."

"All right. I'll go and catch that train."

He walked along with her to the station, talking earnestly to her all the way, striving hard to hammer in the good impression he thought he had made. And he guessed nothing. He saw her so quiet, so subdued, and he did not dream of the storm that raged within her. He did not know that her heart had become a flaming volcano, pouring out an all-destroying lava and burning up in her almost every instinct that goes to the making of humanity.

He spoke to her of the books she was to read. He hoped she would continue the French classes she was attending in the evenings, her music. All the money she wanted should be hers. He offered to open a banking-account for her and would instruct her in the intricacies of it. She refused, and he did not press her. It was better she should keep at her work. It would strengthen her independence, it would bring out all the latent resources of her nature. And above all, she would be kept from being idle, with all the evils that were attendant upon idleness.

And she listened attentively, almost devoutly. He was not to blame. In her life deceit ranked as a high-class

accomplishment. And she deceived him as skillfully as if she had the career and the experience of a world-famed actress behind her.

As he stood at the door of the carriage, waiting for the train to steam out, she said suddenly:

"And you won't forget, Tiny, you'll come and see me again?"

"Word of honor, Sallie."

"And no hope?"

For the moment he was struck by the strange ring in her voice. It should have warned him, but he was blind. And he smiled, thinking she had got hold of some playful catch-phrase with which she would greet him merrily at their next meeting.

CHAPTER VII

SALLIE BURNS HER BOATS

To follow Sallie first.

The passengers, with whom the compartment later filled up, looked with amazement at the beautiful young face set in a stony mask. Its youth was in such contrast to the age-long suffering that lay upon it. But whenever they encountered Sallie's glance they turned away in haste and fear, for her teeth flashed out with the snarl of a young tigress. Not so had she met the people who had stared at her in the restaurant. It seemed to her that these folk, no doubt innocent of all malice and probably pitying her, took a delight in battening on her heart-ache. But she had control enough not to leap in amongst them and create a scene.

Indeed, control was her one great asset now. She had held herself in check as she listened to his unconscious words—it was necessary to lull him into security. But like an iron vice her dread resolve had closed upon her heart.

To hurt him as he had hurt her, to make him "suffer terribly"—his own words. And she knew how to make him suffer. He was coming to take her away to a brighter future. He expected to find her ready to follow him. That expectation was the first thing to be foiled. He would never take her away—he would not be able. When he came again he would find her grappled to her environments with tentacles of steel which all his greatness and

power and wealth would not help him to break. And then she would tell him why she had done it.

All his life he would have to think of her as linked to squalor and vicious sordidness and degradation. She had acquired from those around her the insensibility to pain, self-inflicted or otherwise, which is such a powerful safeguard, as it is a terrible weapon, in the hands of the poor. It gives them the capacity of hurting others, of meting out punishment, even though they punish themselves a hundredfold. The story of Samson is perhaps the only one of the Bible they exemplify in their lives. Sallie knew the story well. She would make herself an illustration of it. She would wreck herself, if it cost him but a single pang.

And it would cost him many. To that extent she took him at his true value. The very nobility of his nature would recoil on him. Oh, yes, he was noble, she knew that well enough. He was true and sincere and his word had the sanctity of a bond. And all these great things were lost to her. They counted as nothing, since they did not total up to the one consummation she had craved. But if they did not count for her, they counted for him. By his own strength he would fail. By his own righteousness he would be punished. The hand he had held up for a blessing would turn against him and it would flourish a scorpion whip that would flagellate his holiest feelings to the blood.

When she reached the London terminus, she found her purse empty, not even a few coppers for her bus fare. So she trudged it, a two hours' trudge. But she felt no weariness. Only her heart felt tired, so tired. It had done so much work that day.

As she turned into Paradise Lane, a raucous bawling met her half way down the street. It came from Number

7. She remembered. This was Mr. Cripps' birthday, and she had arrived at the psychological moment when he "obliged," as he always did on these historic occasions, with an ancient music hall ditty, resurrected from the limbo of mid-Victorian days.

She shuddered at the prospect of having to go near that pandemonium. Her own inner riot could not bear that outward rivalry. She heard the swelling chorus:

"I've got the rino—I'll cut a shine—oh!
Oh, rummy-carfoozalum,
Oh, holy Jeroosalum!
Now wouldn't you like to be in my shoes,
And swill all day on unlimited booze?
For I've got ten thousand a year—
For I've got ten thousand a year."

And like that it would go on till far into the morning. Last year she had been amongst them, joining in lustily, sitting on Curley's knee. Oh, yes, Curley. Where was Curley? She needed him. Well, well, he could be found easily enough.

For a few moments she remained outside, pressing her forehead against the damp wall—it had come on to drizzle—pressing hard. But her hot thoughts could not be cooled. All the pain seemed to have gone to her head, now that she had killed her heart with overwork. Her imagination turned to the canal, a few hundred yards away. It would be cold in there, refreshingly cold. But Tiny would come and weep over her. And tears meant relief, not chastisement.

She slipped upstairs, stopping her ears against the din from the common-room. And then she threw off her shackles. In the adjoining room Mrs. Cripps, having stolen up for a furtive application of her powder-puff—Bertie liked to see her with plenty of powder on her face—heard

unwonted sounds through the jerry-built wall. Cautiously she went and listened. Then she stepped in.

A mad litter met her gaze. And still Sallie went on destroying, ripping at the books, Tiny's books, with frantic hands and spitting out, as it were, savage little exclamations. A smashed mandolin lay on the floor, its body stove in by a cruel heel. She looked up as Mrs. Cripps entered.

"Good gracious, Sallie!" cried the good woman. "You'll set the house on fire with those eyes of yours."

"And I don't care if I burn you all to cinders."

"Who's upset you—Tiny?"

Sallie advanced on her with crooked fingers.

"If you ask any more questions, or mention that name again, I'll strangle you."

"Oh, no, you won't, my dear," said Mrs. Cripps placidly, planting both hands against her ample hips. "Only I could have told you that would be the end of it. You were only wasting your time on him. He's got other fish to fry. Now be sensible, che-ild, and take things as they comes."

Sallie sat down and propped a fist under her chin. But not for the purpose of digesting Mrs. Cripps' good counsel. She was evidently only waiting for her to have her say and be gone. But Mrs. Cripps stayed, maundering on, moralizing in her homely fashion, seemingly not having the faintest idea that she was trying to sweep back the ocean with a broom.

"All I can say is," Mrs. Cripps concluded her allocution, "get back to your own. Get back to Curley."

"Yes, I'm going back to Curley."

"He was here to-day," Mrs. Cripps informed her.

"Was he?" asked Sallie, sitting up.

"He looked terribly bad, poor boy. I'm sure you've broke his heart, Sallie."

Sallie was pleased to hear it. Curley with a broken heart

fitted admirably into her plans. She had her own views as to putting the pieces together again.

"He said as he'd call again later on."

"Did he? All right."

"And you'll see him?"

"Yes, I'll see him."

"You'll be kind to him, Sallie, won't you?"

Sallie only nodded. She could not say how much kindness it would be to Curley, but she knew it would be little kindness to herself.

"And you'll leave off rampaging about?"

"Yes, I've finished." And she cast a vicious look at the results of her vandalism on the floor.

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Cripps, "I hope God knew what he was about when he left you without a mother. But if he did, he's kept it jolly dark."

The words rang in Sallie's brain long after Mrs. Cripps had left. The room felt so empty—no, her mother was not with her to-night. The dear presence was gone. The loving eyes no longer encountered hers out of space. Perhaps, strange as it might seem, it was the supreme token of her love that she left her child to fight this dread fight out by herself. Perhaps it meant that her child was drawing nearer to her, that there was a speedier chance of receiving her back into her sheltering arms. She was happy in her grave, and what greater favor could she show her dear one than to wish her to share that happiness?

And Sallie knew that her intentions, if they went according to plan, meant no uncertain fate. She had no illusions. She knew what going back to Curley meant. Probably the canal in the end, after all. But Tiny should suffer first. It was a roundabout way, but Tiny would have it so.

Her thoughts went back to ancient days. Her memory of them was dim. Time had washed over them with its

tide, merciful or relentless according to the point of view, and they looked faded, ghostlike. The expanding years had taught her the meaning of what her mother had done. But she had never reproached her—her loving loyalty had no room for reprimand. Not even when she tasted all the bitterness of the dire straits to which they were reduced did she breathe to her mother a word of blame for her responsibility for them. No, she had never blamed her before and she certainly did not blame her now. She had now experienced it herself, that compelling power of the heart. It had in it something that drove women mad. As it had driven her mother mad. As it drove herself to madness, or almost so. It made havoc and ruin well worth the cost.

At any rate, her mother had never shown any complaining, and she would not complain either. Her mother's example was good enough for her. Dear mother—had there ever been such a mother? If she had done any repining, it had never been for herself, only for her child. And her child had stopped those repinings with kisses. She liked to think that she had kissed some of her mother's pain away—exactly as her father had meant her to do. Especially that time when the papers brought the news of that same father's fate and her mother had called herself a murderess.

And after that, how brave her mother had become, brave for her little daughter's sake. Only occasionally had she broken down, when she saw that little daughter starve. And Sallie, therefore, had become fed by a miraculous manna and never felt, or at least looked, hungry. But all the time the worm had gnawed at her mother's vitals, till it had taken bodily shape and cankered and poisoned her. The doctors lied when they said she died of drink.

So her thoughts drifted on, incoherent, inconsequent.

At last they anchored on Hazel. What had become of her? They had loved each other very much, they had been such good sisters. It had taken her years to get rid of the void that had been in her at the absence of her dear playmate. But that sentiment too had become calloused by time. And now she really did not care whether she ever saw her again or not. But she hoped she was happy. She hoped there would never be a Tiny in her life.

She was getting impatient at Curley's delay. She wanted to get it over. At last she leapt to her feet. There was Curley's whistle below. It had a thin reedy sound, not at all in keeping with his usual labial shrillness. But such as it was, she recognized it. Just for an instant she hesitated, trembling on the brink. Then, with an angry little cry, anger for that momentary hesitation, she dashed down.

She went to the doorstep and beckoned him. He came up to her with a lagging gait. Yes, she had given him cause to be distrustful of her.

"What, afraid of me, Curley?" she asked with a feeble attempt at banter.

"No, not of you," he drawled, and she wondered at the strangeness of his tone.

"Come up to my room," she said peremptorily.

"What?" he cried in surprise.

"I want to talk to you."

"In your room?" he asked, thinking of her interdict.

"Don't you understand plain English?" she snapped at him with an angry little stamp of her foot.

He followed her, plainly not knowing what to make of it. But as soon as he saw the mad scramble of rubbish on the floor, he understood.

"So you're done with Tiny," he said, rather dazed.

"Done," she repeated, and there was something more than finality in the word. "Good heavens, Curley, what's

the matter with you? You look—dead. You're shaking all over."

He turned away from her scrutiny.

"Is he likely to be about again?" He evaded her question.

"Not enough to trouble you. Oh, is that what you're so upset about?"

"What d'you want to say to me?" he asked abruptly.

"Curley, to-day's Saturday. Will you go and put the banns up to-morrow?"

He gave a start, and she saw that this time he was really trembling.

"What, won't you have me any more, Curley?" she said, nestling her cheek against his shoulder ingratiatingly, cooingly.

He pushed her roughly away, and took to quarter-decking the room with quick uneven strides. She looked at him, amazed at his perplexing manner. Suddenly he pressed both his hands to his head.

"Oh, my God, if only you had said that to me a week ago!"

"Why, what's the difference, Curley? You haven't gone and married somebody else in between, have you?"

"No, I ain't been occupyin' myself this week with matrimony, not much," he said with a grating laugh.

"With what then, Curley?" she asked, looking at him with sudden apprehension. "What have you been up to, Curley? You look so queer."

"What damned business is that of yours?" he snarled at her. "If you say you want us to get spliced, I'm game."

"Then that's settled," she said in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, and turned with a gesture of dismissal. But she saw that he still hung back. "What are you waiting for?"

"Something to go on with, Sallie."

"Something to . . ." And then she saw the greedily

hungry look in his eyes and, understanding, shrank back with a cry of horror. He caught her to him in a fierce embrace.

"Look here, Sallie," he said hoarsely, "we're as good as man and wife. Where's the harm? Let me stay."

A mad turmoil swept through her at the words. Never had she hated anybody as much as she hated him at that moment—perhaps even Tiny came second to him. If she had had a weapon handy, his life would not have been worth a minute's purchase. But the paroxysm died as quickly as it had come to life. A great fear swooped down on her all at once. What guarantee had she that her feelings towards Tiny would be the same to-morrow that they were to-day? Perhaps she would weaken, repent. Perhaps the old magnetism would assert itself again. His persuasive words might exercise their magic. She heard them echoing through her brain, although she refused to listen. But haply they would insist on making themselves heard. That was what she had to guard against. And how could she guard against it better than by clinching her bargain here and now? She turned on Curley with a dreadful laugh.

"Something has driven you mad, Curley," she said, hitting him a blow that made him stagger. "But you're not half as mad as I am. Come on, then, we'll be mad together."

And the violence with which she turned the key in the lock was indeed the action of a madwoman.

The dark hours sped by. Suddenly she awoke and saw Curley sitting at the window. His form, silhouetted against the silver-shot gloom outside, was stooping forward, a hideous, crouching attitude as that of a wild beast preparing for a spring.

"What are you doing there, Curley?" she asked sharply.

"I thought you had gone home long ago. What are you listening for?" And then she uttered a startled exclamation. "Good heavens, what's that?"

There was a thunderous knocking at the front-door, and she knew that it must have been a previous knocking that had woke her up. There was a stampeding sound of naked feet from all the rooms.

"Sallie," said Curley, and his voice sounded hollow as if coming from a tomb, "can you hide me?"

"Hide you? Where—who from?"

He did not answer, but only made a gulping noise. Some authoritative presence had evidently hushed the commotion downstairs.

"I happened to look out through the door and saw him go up to her room with her," Cripps' strident voice was heard saying. "You might find him there now."

And presently footsteps came up the stairs, footsteps that sounded strangely ominous and fraught with doom. They paused outside the room.

"Open in the King's name!" called a voice.

But it was not Curley who opened. It was Sallie, who jumping up threw a wrapper round herself, and swiftly went and unturned the key in the lock. Three men came in, one of them carrying a lighted candle which he set down on the table.

"Jim Bradley, commonly known as Curley, I arrest you for the murder of Phillips, the pawnbroker in Shadwell High Street. Come quietly."

A last flicker of defiance leapt up in Curley.

"You've got no proof!" he cried in a cracked voice.

"We have all the proof that'll satisfy you, my boy. I warn you that anything you say will be used in evidence against you."

Mutely Curley held out his hands to the proffered manacles. But Sallie was upon him with a spring.

"You can't go, Curley—have you forgotten? You've got to put the banns up to-morrow."

"Sorry, I'm afraid the ceremony will have to be postponed to another time and another place," said the officer grimly, giving her a pitying look.

"Just a word to the gal, gents," said Curley, and the men stepped aside.

"I feel better now, Sal, now that it's all over," he said in his more natural voice. "You was right when you said I was druv mad. But it's your fault, Sal, old gal. I did it for you. I wanted to outbid Tiny, to dazzle you with di'monds. He bought you, did Tiny. I know where you got the money for the old woman's funeral and who paid for that fine tombstone of hers. Thought I'd swank about with the shiners, so I took a short cut. Go'blimy, and a short cut it is too. So long, Sallie."

Then they hustled him away, but at the door he turned and hurled another word at her.

"Hope it'll be a boy, Sal!"

Sallie watched them out, standing very stiffly. The short scene, crowded though it had been, seemed to have left no mark on her mind. She wondered how it concerned her. The one quick touch of understanding she had felt was a sneaking admiration of Curley, going out to his doom, a brave jest on his lips.

And then, as the meaning of those parting words glimmered slowly in upon her brain, she spun round as though caught in an eddy of dizziness. She struck out with her hands as though to grasp comprehension from the empty air. Then it came to her. She and Curley had been mad. Suppose his words were more than a jest? In a blinding

flash there shot across her all the possibilities. Oh, heavens, more than a jest? And she made up her mind there and then, that if it at all depended on her, she would make it more than a jest. It should be a living, squalling joke, one that should look at her with eyes and face that were a counterpart of Curley, of Curley who had just gone off to be hanged. Oh, it was glorious! That was even more than she had bargained for in her wildest dreams. What would Tiny say to that?

And she rolled on the bed, screaming with laughter, so that Mrs. Cripps and Mrs. Crowley had to come and hold her down.

CHAPTER VIII

"THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH . . ."

SIR CLEMENT watched the train that took Sallie away till it was out of sight, feeling rather sad. Poor little Sallie! To have come all that way and then to be packed ignominiously home, like a naughty child scolded and sent to the nursery, though nursery did not seem a term quite in keeping with Paradise Lane. Of course he had done it nicely, courteously, had even felt and displayed all the emotion which the occasion had demanded. But he could not help knowing that she had taken it very much to heart. Well, if it would teach her not to yield to impulses of waywardness, the lesson had not been wasted.

That outburst of primitive passion had rather given him pause. But it was becoming dwarfed to its true proportions. She was the result of elementary principles. In her sphere the word morality had an elastic meaning. It was a social stratum where the commandment most observed was the eleventh, and it ran: "Go as you please."

He hoped he had shown her that that view was not current everywhere. He ascribed to himself no great gift for moral-mongering, but he thought he had said enough to stir up the one instinct of which the years had perhaps not taken as much toll as of all the others, her womanly pride. Pique was perhaps too subtle for her. He hoped he had made her proud. She could not have too many safeguards to fence her in.

And, so far as outward appearances went, he could in all conscience say that he had secured Sallie against herself.

He had quelled that mutinous spirit of hers, he had brought her down to walk patiently between the shafts. He thought, in fact, that he had done everything that he had not done. And thus, dispassionately and almost with a certain amount of self-righteousness, he set up for himself a disclaimer for the tragedy of which he was the unconscious and certainly unwilling instrument.

Another aspect of the case then made a demand on his attention. What an ironic coincidence! He had brushed over it lightly during his talk with Sallie. It was inconceivable that the part played by one sister should ever be played by the other. Love did not run in such parallels. Having gained Sallie's love was a sure sign that he would never gain Hazel's.

Something in him had appealed powerfully to the younger sister. And Hazel, being Sallie's polaric opposite, should therefore, with regard to the same person, be animated by an equal degree of resilience. True, there might be something in the radical kinship of family characteristics. A chord might be struck in each, though in a different key. But it was very unlikely—the probabilities were against it. And he laughed to himself for his attempt at psychological dialectics. What his heart could not tell him his brain would never know. Besides, there was Jocelyn. He had forgotten Jocelyn and he promised himself that he would never forget Jocelyn again.

He hurried back, though even so making a detour to avoid passing the cottage. That would have his attention in due time. Dallas was probably waiting for him, and to-day he would have to go deeper with him into things than he had done on previous occasions.

And when he got to his room, Dallas was there indeed. Not, however, Charley of that name, but Will. He was standing at the table, cleaning his Winchester, giving out

the familiar whistle. Exactly as last time. Sir Clement gazed at the apparition, holding himself erect, but without a tremor of surprise or fear.

It seemed so natural that Will should be there. It was almost as if he had been expecting him. He might perhaps say that it was kind and comradely of Will to be here and welcome him on his return home. And this time Sir Clement was sure that he did not address Will. He held no argument with him, he did not go over the old ground. He only stood and waited till it should be Will's pleasure to disappear again. And finally Will did disappear and left Sir Clement to take counsel with himself. This time, at least, he had not fainted.

The first thing to be considered was that the rays of the setting sun were still streaming in through the window. It was not the witching midnight hour when the terrors of the imagination are usually begotten. Will had stalked him in the daylight, showing that time and season did not exist for him. He reserved to himself the right of coming when he chose. He did not subscribe to the rules that were supposed to govern normal and self-respecting ghosts.

So Sir Clement figured it out to himself. Hag-ridden! Oh, yes, the hag was riding him hard, she was riding him at a gallop. And by token of it he felt very cold, as if he were rushing through icy altitudes that strictured his breath.

It was some time before his frozen thought seemed to thaw. Something had to be done. He had already an idea and Charley must help him to carry it out. It was not much of an idea, but better than nothing. It was in the nature of forlorn hopes that they should be attempted. And if this one were tried and did not succeed, he would, at any rate, not be worse off. He would gain something, inasmuch as he would know what he stood to lose—his reason, his sanity. And when it came to that, his plan

was all ready. Captain Middleton had probably also become insane.

When he came down, he found Charley, yes, this time it was Charley. Charley smirked and smiled and spoke softly, and evidently felt no animus for his cavalier treatment on his previous visits. Sir Clement, too, was rather more gracious and seemed to have become reconciled to the establishment of regular and permanent relations.

Charley had put the check in his pocket and was making off with an airy word of leave-taking.

"One moment, Charley," said Sir Clement.

"Oh, certainly."

"Where was Will buried?"

"Why, you've asked me that before and I told you," replied Charley in some surprise.

"I didn't quite take it in. Tell me again."

"Well, left-hand side of the gully I said, didn't I?"

"I'd like to know exactly where he lies, Charley. You know he sometimes comes back to me, and that makes me think he's wandering about in space. It'll make me more comfortable to feel that he's got a proper resting-place."

Charley looked at him as if he did not understand.

"I don't know that I should let that worry me, old chap," he remarked at last.

"But I do worry, Charley. We're not all built the same way, and what may seem nothing to you may mean a lot for me. Now just sit down, and I'll draw a sketch-plan of the place and you'll point out the exact spot."

Charley sat down and, shaking his head, watched Sir Clement draw the plan.

"Here we are, Charley. This is the log-house, and this the gully, and this the cactus-wood. Now just indicate approximately where the grave is."

Charley looked at the drawing and scratched his head.

"I'm in a fog, Derek. I don't know the place well, and I don't let my thoughts go back to it more than I can help. It isn't pleasant for me, you know."

"Oh, stop talking rot. Put your mind to it."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Derek, the night we buried him we had had a bit of a wake, and our feet didn't go exactly where we wanted 'em to go."

"Yes, that's all right. But as near as you can name it," persisted Sir Clement, pinning him to the point.

"Well, as near as I can remember, somewhere around here."

"That would be about half-way between the gully and the cactuses," said Sir Clement, marking the spot with a cross.

"Yes, that would be about it," said Charley, with an air of relief to have done with a difficult job.

"All right, Charley. Now at least I shall know where to picture him to myself when I think of him."

Charley left, feeling for the moment that a trick had been played on him. Why was Derek so keen on knowing where Will was buried? The explanation he had given sounded rather cock-and-bull. The only reason that Charley could imagine was that Derek was going off his chump, and not to be wondered at either, seeing that he had cause to go about in a constant state of panic. And that was again where his daftness showed. He ought to know that Charley would not give him away as long as he paid up. And then, dismissing the whole thing from his mind, Charley walked off jauntily, tapping the check in his pocket, and feeling like a farmer's wife carrying off a particularly rich pail of milk from the cow.

Presently he heard himself accosted and Jocelyn fell into stride with him.

"I say, didn't I see you here some time back?" asked Jocelyn.

"Maybe you did and maybe you didn't," replied Charley, giving him a friendly but guarded look.

"I'm Sir Clement's cousin, you know."

"I congratulate you on the fact."

"From which it would seem there's not much cause for congratulation," laughed Jocelyn.

"I didn't say so at all," Charley retorted quickly. "It's rather a good thing to have a rich man like Sir Clement for a cousin."

"I'm not doing so badly out of him, thank you. I say, you've got some business with Sir Clement, haven't you?"

"Maybe I have and maybe I haven't," said Charley with the same caution as before.

"I suppose connected with something that happened between you and him out in Africa."

"I dare say things happened between him and a good many people out in Africa."

"But you knew him there, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, I knew him there all right."

Jocelyn felt greatly chagrined at Charley's stonewall attitude, but did not show it.

"Are you likely to come again?"

"To be sure. I'll come every three months. I'll be as good as an almanac to Sir Clement."

It was the first direct answer Charley had given, and he gave it, knowing it was no use making a secret of it.

"Then perhaps I'll see you again."

"Maybe you will and maybe you won't."

"So long then. Hope you don't mind my bothering you with my chatter."

"Not at all. Always pleased to talk to a gentleman."

Jocelyn marched off, knowing that he had not done so

badly. So Clement had business with this uncouth fellow. And business was not charity. Business meant money, and money meant—a price. A price for what? Silence, usually in cases like this. So there was something that Sir Clement had to cloak in silence. A secret in his life, one shared by this slithery stranger who was coming to remind him of it every three months. Would it be quite so impossible to make that secret a three-cornered affair?

He went in and came straight up against Sir Clement.

"Hullo, Clem, I heard you were back. Had a good time?"

"Yes, on the whole."

"Fancy going off like that without a word to a chap," said Jocelyn aggrieved.

"Did you want me to ask your permission, Joss?" smiled Sir Clement.

"Nonsense, Clem. But you might have written a line."

"What for? I heard from Ken that you were looking after yourself all right." Which was not the truth.

"Oh, that brings that on the tapis. Go ahead, then, and let's get it over. I suppose Ken has been telling you hair-raising yarns about me."

"Ken hasn't said anything, except that you've been making yourself a bit of a nuisance," said Sir Clement, smiling at him indulgently. After all, he liked the boy, his only surviving kith and kin, as he had told him once before. And moreover, he felt a sort of respect for him. How could one help respecting a man who, in Hazel, had achieved the impossible? "Never mind, boy," he went on, his hand on the other's shoulder, "we won't say any more about it. You've got to scatter your oats, only don't make 'em too wild. I want to be your friend."

Jocelyn, instead of being agreeably touched by the words, seemed to find a hidden meaning in them. Was Clem

currying favor with him? Did he have a presentiment that one day he might have need to be in Jocelyn's good books?

Then they sat down to dinner, Ken joining them. Sir Clement did not say much, and the talk was mainly between Ken and Jocelyn, now apparently again the best of friends. After dinner Jocelyn went out, with a casual reference to an appointment. Sir Clement knew with whom that appointment was. Something cried out in him and he set his lips tightly. Then he turned to Ken and said quietly:

"Come upstairs, Ken. I've something to say to you."

"Fire away," said Ken, when they had got there, seating himself and filling his pipe.

Sir Clement walked up and down once or twice, and then broke out abruptly:

"Ken, I killed a man out there, and now he comes to see me."

The pipe dropped from Ken's hands and he stooped and picked it up leisurely.

"Hold hard a minute, Clem. There's something wrong there."

"Of course there is. That's the whole point," said Sir Clement irritably. "When I say to you that I killed a man out there . . ."

"Yes, that part is all right. I can understand that. We're all apt to kill a man or two in odd moments of our spare time. I've felt tempted many a time to do it myself. But what about his coming to see you?"

"Oh, don't be so dense, Ken. Of course not the fellow himself, but his spirit, his spook, anything you like to call it."

"Hm, I see. Does he come often?"

"Not so very often. He's been here twice."

"Well, then, go and see a specialist."

"There's no specialist special enough for me," said Sir Clement, with a grim shake of his head. "I've got to work it out myself, Ken, if I can. And I rather think I can't. It's getting beyond me."

"So Jocelyn has a nose after all," said Ken, half to himself.

"What's that you're mumbling about Joss?" Sir Clement asked sharply.

"The other day he hinted that he smelt something. But never mind about him. Let's have the story."

And Sir Clement started at the beginning, omitting nothing, minimizing nothing, going on to the end.

"Dallas, the chap we were talking about some time ago," said Ken. "How strange. But I think you were wrong, Clem. You should have stayed and faced it out."

"I couldn't risk it, Ken. The circumstantial evidence was terribly strong against me. I should have gone to the gallows."

"That would have been awkward," said Ken, puffing slowly away.

"I went over it all with myself during my flight across the karoo, not to speak of since. I was a nobody, I had no friends, no influence. If I had gone there and then and given myself up, I should probably not even have seen the paper, I should never have known what was going on here. I wouldn't have told them my real name—the honor of the family, you know—and they would have held that a man is liable to commit a murder whatever his name is. Things would have gone dead against me, and the man who would have sentenced me to death would have become a murderer himself. I couldn't stand the idea of that, Ken—not that I ever had the least fear of crossing the border," he added quietly.

"Hm, that's logical, if a bit finicky," reflected Ken.

"Still, I dare say I would have objected myself to a man becoming my murderer, even with the best intentions in the world. Now, Clem, we must put our heads together and see what is to be done."

"There's only one thing to be done, and it's for you to do it."

"Is it? Then consider it done."

"Ken, I want you to go and fetch him."

"Clem!" shouted the other, springing up.

"I know it sounds mad, but perhaps you won't think it quite so mad when I tell you what's behind it. I've been carrying the idea about with me for some time, but I drove it home as I saw him lying there to-night, staring at me with those dead white eyes of his. You know, Ken, I'm not stuck on religion, but in my heart of hearts I feel I'm a believer. It may be an old wives' tale, a medieval superstition. But the poor fellow is lying out there, huddled away into some unconsecrated spot, without benefit or blessing of clergy. Somehow I know it would do me good to know that he had Christian burial. Perhaps it's that that's making him restless. Ken, there may after all be something in Hamlet's words to Horatio."

He had sat down, his head sunk low on his chest. Ken looked at him in a fierce access of commiseration. In a telepathic flash he felt what this man was suffering. Many things became clear to him, but what he saw most clearly of all was his friend's desperate state when he had to resort to such desperate measures for regaining his mental equipoise. And yet he also saw that there was some logic in it. Everything in life was largely a matter of impression, and it depended greatly on how things appeared to the person impressed. Clem had set his heart on this and it might have an effect. If it did not quite spell a

remedy, it might at least alleviate his trouble. Great consequences turned on trifles and perhaps the smaller the pivot the greater the revolution.

"I'll go, Clem," he said.

"Thanks. I knew you would. And you'll start at once. I'll give you all particulars, among them a sketch-plan of the locality and the radius within which to search for the grave."

"There'll be bother with the authorities—a permit for exhumation and all that sort of thing."

"Nothing of the kind. Not a soul will interfere with you. It's absolutely No Man's Land."

"Have you by any chance a picture of him?"

"I have," and Sir Clement fetched out a photo, on which the two men were seen linked arm in arm.

"Hasn't changed an atom," said Ken, examining it critically. "I should have known him again in a million. By Jove, you seemed to have been on pretty good terms."

"As God is my witness, I meant well by him."

"Don't go into that again."

"By the way, a brother of his is over here and I stop his mouth with gold."

"Hm, I don't know about the policy of that," said Ken, wrinkling his brows. "However, what are you going to do meanwhile?"

"I can't go back to the place where I've been trying to sink myself. There are reasons. I don't know, perhaps I'll travel a bit. Do the Continent."

"Excellent, most excellent. And don't pack your phantasmagorias into your portmanteau. What about Jocelyn, though?"

"What about him?"

"He'll run amok here, with you and me away."

Sir Clement pondered for a little while, and his eyes seemed to delve deep into something that was beyond Ken's reach.

"I'll take him along, Ken, if he'll come. But I don't think he will."

"Why shouldn't he want to come?"

"He may have his reasons for staying here."

"Then it'll be for you to get over his reasons."

"I'll do my best, but I doubt."

Ken rose with a shrug.

"If he won't come, we must make the best of it. You must put the fear of God into him to let Waggles and people like that alone. Well, I'd better go and see about things. With luck I can catch next week's boat."

CHAPTER IX

HAZEL FINDS OUT THINGS

SIR CLEMENT remained behind, nerving himself to place his project before Jocelyn. After all, he did not want him to run amok. Or was it a dull sense of hopeless jealousy rearing its head? Good God, where was it all to end if jealousy of Jocelyn were to add itself to his other torments?

When Jocelyn came back, rather early and looking somewhat down in the mouth, he set on him at once.

"Joss, boy, I'm going on the Continent. Would you like to come along?"

"Wouldn't I! Rather—like a shot."

The reply floored Sir Clement completely.

"When do we start?" asked Jocelyn in great excitement.

"To-morrow, probably."

"And we'll do Paris?"

"Most likely we'll do Paris," nodded Sir Clement.

"Hurrah!" shouted Jocelyn, flinging his cap in the air.

Sir Clement, once more alone, could not quite understand it. Youth was a curious thing, catching at the joy —the toy—of the moment. How could Jocelyn, how could any one, leave Hazel unless stern necessity compelled? Perhaps it meant a greedy economy of pleasure. The delights of their love would not be wasted in their separation. They would accumulate unexpended, culminating in the more delirious transports of their reunion. Jocelyn would go away, secure of Hazel. He left no rival,

he need fear no interloper Sir Clement wondered what Jocelyn would say if he knew of the silent, the unconfessed rival he had. He would laugh with the cruel exultancy of boyhood that took delight in pulling limbs from living things

And Hazel? No, no, he would not go back to that—he had been over it all before. Why had he thrilled at knowing himself near her again? He had never been away from her She had lived along of him all the time down in Paradise Lane. And it had not deserved its name any more for all that. He should feel glad that the torment had kept alive in him all through. He should not wish it to die. He should be proud that he was taking his punishment like a man. He had worked like a man, he had suffered like a man. Yes, and now, like a man, he would go and face her again.

It was not really very late—not more than half past nine And first thing in the morning they would be off. There would be no other chance. He would venture it.

Miss Witherspoon opened for him with a glad cry of welcome and drew him into the sitting-room, which was empty.

"I want to report to you," he said in a low tone.

"Yes? Have you been successful?"

"Partly so. It's an interim report. I can't say more than that. I'm on the way to doing some good. I hope to let you know more in a few months."

"It can be left safely in your hands."

If either of them knew the irony of those words!

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Upstairs. Not very well."

"Then I won't trouble her. I only looked in for a moment."

"I'll tell her you are here."

And before he could stay her, she had slipped out and presently he heard the two coming down.

"Ah, Miss Middleton, you know my unorthodox hours," he said, taking her outstretched hand.

She smiled wanly. He saw at once that her plea of indisposition was a pretext. Her face was a little drawn, but otherwise the bloom of health shone from it. Only her eyes had a hard glitter in them as though they had been washed by angry tears. He connected the fact at once with Jocelyn's early return, and was very wroth with him for making her cry. And yet, happiness required so little provocation to tears. Lovers' tiffs . . . and he thought of the Latin tag.

"Well, if you two are going to chatter, I'll never get on with my work," said Miss Witherspoon briskly. "I've got to get ready for the term examination, Sir Clement. I'll go to my room. Come on, Gory. You really must get out of that nasty habit of eavesdropping."

"What a shame to drive you out!" said Sir Clement soberly.

He was a little surprised that Hazel made no effort to detain her, all the more as Miss Witherspoon's excuse sounded a little lame.

"I hope my presence has not been needed here, Miss Middleton."

"Not as far as the school was concerned," Hazel replied rather listlessly.

"Then in what other respects?"

"I don't think I was referring to anything."

"The estate? Mr. Hobhouse is very capable. You see" —he paused for a moment—"I am only a bird of passage. I'm leaving again to-morrow."

Was it his fancy that she gave a start? There also seemed a tremulous note in her voice as she said, with not a very mirthful laugh:

"What a restless person you are!"

"There may be things that spoil our rest," he answered gravely.

"What spoils yours, Sir Clement?"

"You!"

The word was on the tip of his tongue, but he checked it in time.

"You know I'm used to large spaces, Miss Middleton," he said instead. "Woodlands Priory is very small. Switzerland and Italy will form just a respectable annex to it."

"Oh, abroad? Are you sorry you left the old life, Sir Clement?"

"I am and I am not. We must make the best of things and try and find our compensations wherever we are."

"There must be very little to compensate you in Woodlands."

For the second time she gave him the maddening cue. Was it intentional? Was she, after all, a coquette? For a moment he felt tempted to fling it in her teeth, to tell her that she contained in herself all the values of life, all its splendor, all its recompense. To tell her likewise that she also summed up all its tragedy. It would serve her right to make her quake and cower under the storm she had unloosed. He looked round the bright, pretty room, rosy in the gleam of the chintz-covered lamp-light—it had become gaunt and gray in the reflection of his misery. What had she been talking about? Oh, the compensations of Woodlands.

"You forget I haven't had much time to study the place," he reminded her.

"Not that you seem very anxious for it."

"At any rate, this time I'm taking a part of Woodlands away with me."

"I hear that in America they transfer whole towns."

"Oh, no, not as bad as that," he smiled. "I'm only referring to my cousin Jocelyn."

"What, Jocelyn going too? That'll be nice for him. Not that I think him particularly representative of Woodlands."

Here too that baffling, unexpected effect. No sign of sorrow, of consternation at the impending parting. Just a clasping of hands, which might signify a gesture of resignation, or equally, curiously enough, a dumb prayer of thankfulness. There was a pause. He saw she was fidgeting. She gave an abrupt turn to the conversation, striking a lighter note.

"Do you know, Sir Clement," she said with a smile, "that, if your name is not exactly anathema, you are just now not very popular in the village?"

"I am sorry to hear it."

"I was thinking of it before, when you asked whether your presence was needed here. Perhaps that is why you kept away. I don't know if it has come to Mr. Hobhouse's ears, but I hear a good deal from the children. Your tenants are indignant at having been invaded by an army of workmen, who meddle with their roofs, pull up their floors and generally make them very uncomfortable."

"Yes, I know Kenneth has started the work," he said moodily. "So they don't like it? That's of the spirit that lost me the election. They don't want to know who's their friend. Well, I can't help their grumbling at being shaken up out of their routine. I refuse to let them wallow any longer in their sties. As far as lies in me I will stamp out dirt and disease in my domain. I am afraid my uncle has been a neglectful, easy-going man, or else he has been

served by faithless stewards. The people shall be protected against themselves. I'll do my best to promote happiness wherever mere money can do it."

His words rang like a clear bugle-call. She caught at them eagerly. Here was her chance to set at rest a misgiving, a doubt that had haunted her for a long time.

"Then as far as mere money is concerned, you will do anybody a service?"

"Anybody who has a claim on me."

"Even if you did not believe in them?"

"I disbelieve in nobody. I give everybody his chance."

She dared not question any more for fear of betraying herself. His was such a keen, quick mind. But he would not let her off so lightly.

"Why do you ask?"

"I like to find out things."

He trembled. Would she ever find out what he had to hide from her? Oh, that would be an evil day for him. He would have to shun her presence. The sight of her face, the sound of her voice—exquisite joy and sorrow in one!—would be denied to him. He turned on her almost fiercely.

"Is there anything else you would like to find out?"

"No, Sir Clement," she said, a faint blush flushing her cheek. "It's your turn now to find out things. But I won't make it hard for you. There's a load weighing on my conscience."

"A load—your conscience?" he echoed vaguely.

"I feel I owe you a confession."

"Does your soul need improvement?"

"And an apology," she went on, ignoring his banter. "When I first knew you, I disliked you very much. I am afraid I thought badly of you."

"You may stop there, Miss Middleton, and not proceed to the apology. I have a habit of getting myself disliked. You were perfectly entitled to make the same mistake that most other people have made. And then, perhaps, it isn't a mistake."

"Do you mind if I keep to my own opinions, Sir Clement?"

"We will leave it at that, Miss Middleton."

He rose, almost violently. He possessed tremendous powers of endurance—he had proved it. But this was too much. He had borne her hatred, but her goodwill screwed the rack beyond the limit of his strength.

"I'm afraid I must go. Good-by."

"Good-by, Sir Clement," she said slowly, almost reluctantly, taking his hand. She must have said something stupid. She seemed to have made him angry. "Will—will you let me hear from you?"

"I shall be conventional and send you picture postcards. But you need not acknowledge them."

"Why not?" she asked, with perhaps a tinge of disappointment.

"Your replies would probably not reach me. We shall be moving very fast."

He was thinking of Jocelyn. He was rather doubtful how Jocelyn would take the matter. He would probably ask to be enlightened on the how and the why, and he was perhaps not the easiest person in the world to deal with on points of explanation. Better to leave well alone. But still Sir Clement did not go. He stood hesitating. It had occurred to him whether, before he went, he ought not to give her a hint of what he had done about Sallie. It was not fair to let it come on her like a bolt from the blue. But he could not think of anything more than the vaguest reference.

"Miss Middleton, about the time I come back I expect to have some news for you."

She shook her head, quite at a loss. Then an idea occurred to her which, somewhat to her annoyance, made her breath come and go a little unevenly, an idea which she thought it presumptuous, or even bad taste, to mention. Whom did the news refer to, to him or to her? She was burning to ask him whether the traveling party would include others besides Jocelyn—ladies, for instance. But she contented herself with saying:

"I hope it will be good news, Sir Clement."

"It is always best to hope for the best."

It was a cryptic utterance which only increased her perplexity.

She did not see him to the front-door which function was undertaken by Miss Witherspoon, who had come down on hearing them move.

"Have you any purpose in going away so often?" she asked him in a whisper.

"You knew my purpose last time," he answered, half reproachfully.

"And this time?"

"A man must work out his scheme of life."

"I don't want to know about that. I was only wondering whether your idea in going away coincided in any way with mine."

"I should first have to know what your idea is, Miss Witherspoon."

"I can't tell you that without being indiscreet. But, judging from what I have observed during your last absence, I can only say that you're on the right track. The best thing you can do is to go away again and—for God's sake, stay away as long as you can."

And with that she almost pushed him out.



He left her, wondering greatly at her mysterious manner. She was a good woman, but given rather to spinning spider-threads out of her own imagination and looking upon them as solid ropes of fact. She was dreaming something and he vaguely surmised it was connected with Hazel. All he gathered from it was that she advised him that it was best to stay away from Hazel as long as he could, which he knew quite well without her advice. She did not know that Hazel herself had a say in the matter. Even if he stayed away from Hazel, she would not stay away from him. She was with him always and everywhere. She had followed him down to Paradise Lane—she would follow him to the end of his journeys.

It was that for which she had been sent to him.

CHAPTER X

SALLIE'S RECKONING

SIR CLEMENT, with Jocelyn, came back after three months, with two or three days to spare. He had to leave a margin for Charley Dallas.

At the London station he packed Jocelyn off to the flat. He himself was going to see Sallie. He had thought of her often, sometimes not without misgivings, but usually his heart was high with hope. His final conclusion of her was that Sallie was not fool enough to throw her life away. If anything she would be kept afloat by his promise of that wonderful something which he had told her the future held in store for her. He felt some curiosity to see what these months had made of her. He thought to find a product sufficiently finished for production.

It was half past six, and Sallie should be home from work by now. As he entered the common-room, Mr. Cripps, the solitary occupant, rose at him with a glad cry.

"Tiny, of all people, blowed if it ain't! Crikey, and ain't I glad to see you. You're as welcome as daisies in the spring."

"Yes, you see I've turned up again, like a bad penny," smiled Sir Clement. Cripps looked at him in amazement.

"Why, hardly reckernized you, Tiny. Jimminy, ain't we swell." He felt the cloth of Sir Clement's tweed suit. "Must have cost a mint o' money, them togs. Come into a fortune?"

"Something like it, Cripps. Where's Sallie?"

"Upstairs in her room." Cripps' face had become grave.

"We don't hardly see nothing of her since—well, you know what." And he nodded his head mysteriously.

Sir Clement thought it good tidings, Sallie staying in her room, keeping herself to herself. Cripps' enigmatic reference bore no meaning for him, and he did not ask. Whatever it was he would find out from Sallie herself.

Gently he opened the door. She was sitting at the window, looking out, her hands folded in her lap, with a piece of needlework between them, and so wrapt in her thoughts that she did not hear him enter.

"Hullo, Sallie!" he called softly.

"You?" she exclaimed, springing up but holding to the ledge of the chair.

"Why so surprised? I told you I would come."

He gazed at her, a vague fear suddenly clutching at his heart. She was changed—oh, so changed! Her face was drawn and jaded, all its beautiful curves gone, and a brooding gloom was smoldering in her eyes. She looked years older. He went up to her with a deeply solicitous air.

"Sallie, what's the matter with you? Are you ill?" he asked in a shaky voice.

"Ill?" She answered him with a smile that was more a grimace. "No more ill than other women when they're like me."

"Like you?"

He stared at her vacantly. Then his eye caught some little garments spread out on the table, and the dreadful truth flashed on him. He snatched up her left hand.

"Sallie, for God's sake, where's your wedding-ring?"

"At the jeweler's, I expect," she replied with the same grimace as before.

The room spun round him and with a moan he sat down on the bed. Her eyes followed him, baleful, malignant, exultant. The moment for which she had hungered, the

prospect of which had enabled her to bear her trouble with a strength superhuman, the moment was here. And, as she saw him sitting there in his mute misery, she thought it had been well worth waiting for. Presently he sprang to his feet.

"Who's the father, Sallie?"

"You, Tiny," she replied, and that horrid grimace was on her again.

He walked up and down the room, wringing his hands. Abject, dishonored, and driven out of her mind, too!

"Don't you know you walk in your sleep, Tiny?" she taunted him.

"That's a lie!" he thundered at her.

"Of course it is, Tiny, but you're the father all the same. You made me do it. If you hadn't thrown me over that time, if you had given me the least little hope, I should never have come to this. Now then, Tiny, are you suffering?"

He stood up, his tall form swaying over her.

"Sallie, this can be put right, and, by God, it shall. If the man isn't willing, I'll buy him for you. Will ten thousand be any good to him?"

"Hardly."

"Hardly? Well, twenty thousand, a hundred."

"Not a hundred millions, Tiny. I dare say he'd be willing enough, but they won't let him."

"Who won't let him?"

"You see, they have fixed up an important engagement for him. It's at Brixton Prison. That's where he'll be hanged at eight in the morning."

"Hanged—hanged—who?" he murmured, dazed.

"Why, Curley. He killed somebody, as you did. Only they found him out."

There was a terrible pause. He was too numbed to

feel the personal gibe. He only thought, with a frantic despair, that if he had been on the spot Curley might perhaps have been saved.

"Was his case properly conducted—was he well defended?" he asked dully.

"I suppose as well as his lawyer knew how," she said with a shrug of indifference. "Curley had confessed to me in front of the cops. His lawyer set up a plea that it wasn't Curley, that he had only said it to shield somebody else. But he'd left his signature all over the place, and they brought in some finger-prints they had of him from a little affair he'd had with the police four years ago and that the lawyer didn't know about. But it was all through you that he did it."

"No, Sallie," he said with a grim shake of his head, "I can't take the sins of the whole world on my shoulders."

"All the same, it was you that made him do it. He wanted to get me a diamond as big as the stone you put on my mother's grave."

He nodded with vague understanding. So that was Curley's big thing and, true enough, he was not free from all responsibility for it.

"However, it doesn't matter," she went on. "He only got what was coming to him."

"Sallie," he said with a sudden wonder, "you talk as if you never cared for him."

"I hated him. Only I hated you more."

He buried his face in his hands. Things swam before his eyes and the confusion extended to his inner vision. He did not follow her. What had her hatred of him, what had her talk about his giving her no hope to do with this mad deed of hers? He dared not put his question into words, but he asked it in his despairing eyes. She read it there and answered him.

"That's exactly how I wanted you to feel," she cried, exulting in her triumph. "Knocked you all of a heap, did it? Let me tell you, dear Tiny. You didn't want me for your plaything. So I made up my mind to be somebody else's, somebody not quite as good as you. Though I don't see there's much to choose between a murderer who's hanged and one that isn't."

He stretched out his arms to her with a gesture now openly imploring.

"For God's sake, Sallie, don't!" he moaned.

But she had not finished yet.

"I wanted to have a bit of my own back. Women of my sort don't take things lying down. We're out for murder, the same as you men. And something's been murdered here, Tiny, hasn't it? Both in you and in me. I don't care a rap about myself. But I'm glad your heart's weeping tears of blood."

"Are you going to say any more?" he flung at her, goaded to menace.

"No need to say any more. You'll be saying quite enough to yourself. You were always a devil to think. When you go away from here you'll put it all in your pipe and smoke it. And it won't taste like honeydew, nor even good shag."

He clawed at his palms in the agony of his grief.

"Fooled you nicely, didn't I?" she went on, nibbling at the words with a fine tooth of malice. "All you thought you had to do was to send me away with a lot of good advice about books and French and music, all that kind of rubbish. But you didn't know what was going on inside me. I suppose you'll think twice now about taking me away from here."

He got up and gripped her by both shoulders.

"I won't even think once, Sallie. You'll come away im-

mediately, to a place where you'll be properly taken care of till your trouble is over."

"Shan't!" she cried, breaking away from him violently. "I don't want to be taken care of. I'm not going to leave this place. I never meant to leave it from the moment you gave me my marching orders. I'm not going to give you the chance of making anything right to me. I want you to think of me, dragging myself through the gutter, splashing in mud up to my hips, in my arms a gallow-bird's . . ."

"Yes, do that, Sallie," he urged her quietly. "Then we'll both go to hell."

"Where do you come in, Tiny?"

"I swear to you, Sallie," and he thumped the table heavily, "that if you don't do as I tell you, I'll go and give myself up."

"Oh, no, Tiny," she said quickly, seemingly alarmed by his threat. "They may hang you too. And then you won't be able to feel bad about me. You've got to feel bad, Tiny, or else I'll have flung myself away for nothing. Now don't do anything rash. Go away quietly, and I'll think it over."

"I don't trust you. You tricked me once. You've admitted it."

A great weariness seemed to have come upon her.

"Oh, don't let's quarrel about it, Tiny. I'm really not strong enough to quarrel. And look how strong you are. Call that a fair fight?"

"Yes, I'll show you how strong I am, Sallie," he said bitterly. "I'll make you give in to me. I've got other troubles on my hands. This would about finish me."

"Poor Tiny!"

He did not know what to make of her. He dimly sensed that her ferocity was broken. She had changed from a truculent bravado to a state of almost tractable docility.

And, indeed, he had no idea of that genuine, that well-nigh miraculous revulsion in her feelings. What was going on in her mind? She felt she had won her battle, but she had won it by being conquered, beaten to her knees. She had stung him, stung him hard, had seen him writhe. But she had left the sting in the wound, with the usual fate of the offending wasp. All the virus was gone out of her, all the stamina. She was not, as she had said, strong enough to fight with him, with the world. All she felt capable of was a great pity, not towards herself, for self-pity dwelt not in the stony regions trodden by her feet, but pity towards him—for having made him suffer so. Was there any way of making that good to him?

"Are you sorry for what you've done, Sallie?" he asked her. It was important to find out if she had grasped the enormity of her trespass.

"Oh, yes, in a way," she replied, bearing his scrutiny without flinching. "It was rather silly of me to make all this fuss about nothing. I wish you wouldn't worry about it any more, Tiny."

"I'm not worrying any more. I've made up my mind and I'm going to find a way out of this mess."

"What way, Tiny?"

"I'll let you know very soon."

"What about that girl?"

"Don't talk of her."

"Will it be a hard way for you, Tiny?" she asked, coming back to the point.

"A devilish hard way—I'm making no bones about it. But that won't stop me."

She caught him by the arm and looked up at him cajolingly.

"Won't you tell me what you mean to do?"

He kept silent for a while, then, ignoring her question, said:

"I'm going away to-night. But I'll be back in a day or two. You'll be all right till then, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, till then and ever after. Will it be really so hard, Tiny, dear?"

He noted her habit of harping on the same point, of coming back to it again and again. He remembered the other time she had done so, but took no warning from it. He turned to the door.

"Just a minute, Tiny," she said. "You owe me something."

He looked at her, puzzled.

"D'you remember that kiss I gave you? You've never given it back to me."

He stooped down and kissed her and felt her lips quivering as if with pain.

"Tiny, dear," she said with something that was midway between a sob and a giggle, "I find I've made a mistake. I thought I hated you—till you came. Then I found that I love you still, love you as much as ever, better than myself, better than anything in the world. I wouldn't like to make you miserable, Tiny, dear. I'm sorry you can't love me back, Tiny."

He made a movement with his hand as if to shut off her fountain of speech, then put it mechanically in his pocket.

"I almost forgot," he murmured.

"No, no, don't offer me money," she cried. "I won't need any. You're feeling a little better, Tiny, aren't you?"

The damned themselves felt happier than he did and she knew it. But she made pretense, for it would not do to rouse his suspicions. He had his way and she had hers,

and the two were different. If he had his, neither of them could be happy. And she was no dog in the manger. She sat for a long time, thinking what a grand thing it was to ensure the happiness of the man one loved.

He had gone away, not knowing that Sallie had tricked him again after all. He stepped into the common-room and called Cripps.

"I'll be back to-morrow or next day. Meanwhile I want you and the Missis to look after Sallie. See that she isn't short of anything. If there's anything urgent, wire me to this address."

He gave Cripps a slip of paper and a ten-pound note. Cripps looked at it with stolid respect.

"Proud that you trust me with it, Tiny," he said, drawing himself up. Then he furtively passed the back of his hand across his mouth and drew in his breath with a soft gurgle.

"And I won't mind if you spend something out of it on yourself," smiled Sir Clement.

So Sallie thought he was going away feeling happier. Well, if she really was of that opinion she was welcome to it. He would sooner have it that way. She had to be soothed and kept quiet till he came back and took her into his keeping for good.

His resolve was firm, but he thought it would only be fair to himself and to Sallie to take a little while for bringing it to the sticking point. And then he knew it would stick. He would have no quarrel with Sallie for having precipitated him into a step that affected his whole future. Also there was Charley Dallas to be attended to, and Ken was not back yet. And Cripps was looking after Sallie.

So far he had arranged everything nicely, neatly, to dove-tail into his plan. All that he now had to do was to marshal the data he had to go upon. The main thing was

that he had made it impossible for Hazel to get her sister back. He had told her to hope for the best, and this would be a ghastly travesty of the optimism he had enjoined on her. He shuddered at the thought of bringing together that flower of purity with the rank weed Sallie had made of herself. Hazel knew what her mother had become, and now he was to tell her that Sallie had equaled that melancholy record. And further, that he himself had been the unconsciously guilty cause of it. He would sooner die first.

No, Hazel should never know of her sister's shame. When they met it should be a stainless Sallie, a Sallie redeemed from her degradation, that should kiss her sister's undefiled lips.

And, of course, there was only one way of doing that. From the moment he had become aware of Sallie's sorry plight he had known which way his duty pointed. To give her his name, to shield her unborn child under the sacrament of an unshamed fatherhood—that was what he owed her. Perhaps it would go to his requital account. Perhaps it would be a set-off against the life he had taken to foster this new life that was coming into the world, to plant the tender nursling in a good soil and raise it to splendid man or womanhood. If it was a boy, he would call him Will, and perhaps Will Dallas' resentment would become blunted at this token of his slayer's sincerity of repentance.

But a greater thing even than that hung upon his heroic deed. He was willingly laying his soul upon the wheel to be broken. He was setting up a barrier between himself and Hazel which he would not be able to leap, even though she stood on the other side with wide-open arms.

Strange glimmerings of hope had come to him while he was away on his travels. A flickering intuition had shown

him a tiny speck of light—no, he could not call it a star—gleaming forth on the horizon. She had been different to him the last time he had seen her, just the minutest shade of difference. Miss Witherspoon's parting message, upon which he had pondered much, had also become prolific of meanings.

And there had been something more. There had obviously been a breach of some sort between her and Jocelyn, some estrangement. They had exchanged no letters, of that he was certain. His own postcards had gone off punctiliously, but, true to his prohibition, she had not answered. Somehow, however, he fancied that those postcards had been received with pleasure. He would say no more than that.

And now he could say no more. So far his love had at least been no crime. It was pure, honest, solemn, and he could look it steadfastly in the face. But it was no longer so. He would have to lock it up in the darkest recesses of his heart as a guilty thing one was ashamed to show to the daylight. And even so, reft of sun and air though it would be, he knew it would not die. It would struggle on, blind, despairing, rebellious, a goad and a torment to him. He would forge fetters for it which it would break time after time. He would wrestle with it, but it would not be subdued. He would try to make it dumb, but always and always it would go on crying within him one word, one name:

"Hazel, Hazel!"

But all that should not matter. All that would not cause him to break the forced troth he had dumbly plighted to Sallie. They would both walk by his side, a twin-team. Sallie would be his lawful wife, and Hazel would be the secret mate of his soul. God would pardon such bigamy.

There was much pity needed on earth, but perhaps there was still a little left of it in heaven.

And despite all his self-control tears gathered in his eyes. He thought he heard them fall with a hissing sound on the white heat of his resolve.

He spent a sleepless night and was up early, very early, ranging afar through the dew-drenched grass. After breakfast two missives were brought to him. One was a Marconigram from Ken, announcing his arrival in a couple of days.

The other was a wire from Cripps, and it said;

"Come at once. Sallie dying."

CHAPTER XI

SISTERS TWAIN

It was fortunate that he was alone in the room—Jocelyn had not yet come down. He looked round, surprised to find himself still alive after that sledge-hammer blow. It had only stunned him. But it was some time before he knew what to do, or at least before he admitted it to himself. For that there was but one thing to do, and that it must be done, was beyond all question.

As in an evil dream he made his way to the school. That was where he would find her—school had already begun. At every step a precipice loomed up before him, an abyss that yawned but was not merciful enough to engulf him. He walked straight into Miss Witherspoon's private little room and, not heeding her cry of startled surprise, locked the door.

"Good heavens, Sir Clement, why do you do that?" she said as he turned to her. "And if that's the face one gets on the Continent, then I'll never move out of dear old England."

"Something terrible has happened," he said, meeting her glance with blood-shot fierceness in his own.

She put her hand to her heart.

"Concerning Hazel," she voiced her presentiment.

He nodded and then told her as much as he thought it necessary for her to know.

"I suppose you want me to come with you to her," she said when he had finished.

"I would sooner you broke it to her."

"Be a man, Sir Clement!" she cried, giving him a fierce little shake.

They went to the door of Hazel's room and Miss Witherspoon called to her. She came at once.

"Hazel, Sir Clement wants to take you somewhere."

"If he'll give me permission to absent myself," she said with forced gayety.

She made no reference to Sir Clement's unexpected appearance. The occasion did not seem to lend itself to petty everyday courtesies. It was easy enough for her to see that here was disaster, and she nerved herself to meet it bravely. Miss Witherspoon immediately hurried away and left them together.

"Where do you want me to go with you, Sir Clement?"

"To London. To see a sick relative of yours. But perhaps there will be better news when we get there."

"A relative?" she echoed with a start of astonishment. "But I don't know that I have any."

"You had a sister, didn't you? If we hurry we can catch the ten o'clock express. The car's waiting."

Without a word, white to the lips, she went and put on her hat and coat.

"I knew it meant misfortune the moment I saw you," she said as she sprang into the car.

They caught the train with half a minute to spare.

"Where did you meet my sister?" she asked after a while.

"I went to look for her and found her."

"And—and my mother?"

"Died some months ago."

The train rushed on, eating up the distance, but those were the only words exchanged between them during the two hours' run. When they got to the other end, they stepped into a taxi, and a quarter of an hour's drive brought them to their destination.

She looked round the grim bleak street with a shudder.

"Is this where my sister lives—if she lives?"

"It is."

"Has she lived here long?"

"Years. She is quite happy here. She told me once that one could feel contented sitting on a grid-iron in hell."

"Then I wonder what her experiences have been to make her say that."

He gave no answer but helped her to alight. In the passage they were met by Cripps, who had come rushing out. At a questioning glance from Sir Clement he shrugged his shoulders and mutely turned down his thumbs, not knowing he was using a classic gesture whereby, in the Roman amphitheaters, the doom of the defeated gladiator was sealed. So she was doomed, thought Sir Clement. He had known it all the time. Quickly he drew Cripps aside.

"How did it happen?"

"Last night, a couple of hours after you was gone, we heard her tumbling down the stairs. She came a terrific cropper from the top right down to the bottom. It's a steep high stairs, you know. I suppose she slipped and fell."

"You suppose—you don't mean that . . ."

"Oh, no, no," Cripps replied in alarm. "I'm sure it was a haccident—pure haccident."

And with a quick glance at Hazel he withdrew hurriedly into the common-room.

"What does he say—will she die?" asked Hazel, trembling.

"I don't put any store on what he says. He's an ignorant man of the people. They are apt to get panicky."

Then Sir Clement took her by the arm and led her up those steep high stairs looking so innocent of tragedy. Just as they got to the top, a man, whose vocation could

not be mistaken, came out of Sallie's room. Him too Sir Clement drew aside.

"A certain condition—peritoneal pyemia," replied the doctor pedantically to Sir Clement's question.

"Good Lord, can't something be done? A Harley Street man, perhaps. . . ."

"Not the slightest good. She'll be gone before his eminent nibs gets his boots on. Wasn't worth while taking the poor thing to the hospital—only give her unnecessary pain. Fortunately no inquest will be necessary."

Sir Clement heard the callous words, chilled to the marrow. Then they entered softly. Mrs. Cripps was sitting by the bedside, her face puffed and swollen with weeping.

And there lay Sallie, her glorious hair tumbled about her shoulders, her face a mask of marble, wondrously beautiful. Sir Clement stood within reach of Hazel, ready to support her. But it was not needed. A statue of stone does not collapse. With slow measured step she advanced to the bed and knelt down. The white lips were murmuring—here and there a phrase could be distinguished.

"Ding-dong—there goes the bell. Now they're in the cell, pinioning him. Oh, please don't, Mr. Cripps! Don't pull the lever—let the poor thing live!"

Then there was silence in the room, broken only by Mrs. Cripps' suppressed sobs, and Sallie seemed to sleep. But presently she became restive again, and her fingers fumbled all over the counter-pane and so touched the smooth softness of a hand.

"What's this?" she asked, fastening upon it. "This isn't you, Cripps, old girl." Her tone was more collected, almost rational.

"Salome!" sobbed Hazel quietly.

Slowly Sallie opened her eyes wide.

"How nice to hear that name again! Nobody has called me that for ages." She touched the shoulder of the kneeling figure. "Then you're Hazel, aren't you? Fancy your coming to see me after all this time. Who brought you, Tiny?"

Sir Clement stepped forward.

"Yes, I'm here, Sallie. But you mustn't talk, child."

Obediently Sallie closed her lips, and Hazel stole her arm round the poor frame and held her close.

"My sister—oh, my little sister!"

The words were whispered, but they were plainly audible. Mrs. Cripps had gone out and every sound took on a terrible distinctness in the hush of the room. Sir Clement stood in an agony of irresolution. He should have asked the doctor to stay, he should have sent for another one, he should have insisted on the specialist. But he dared not leave the room. Something might happen any moment and Hazel would be alone. He had seen many people take the last long step and he knew the presages of death. Hazel had come only just in time.

So a quarter of an hour passed. Sallie lay very still, making no move, giving no sign of life save for an occasional quick-fluttering breath. Then she said with startling suddenness:

"Tiny, are you there?"

"Yes, Sallie. I'm here."

She held out her hand and he took it in both his own.

"Tiny, your way out—to marry me, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Sallie," he replied, battling down the fierce agony of his heart. "I should have told you last night. I shouldn't have gone away without telling you."

Her lips contracted in a bitter smile.

"Don't worry, Tiny. Would have made no difference. I know who you are, what I—was. Should never have

married you. Wasn't going to mess up your life. Loved you. My way—better."

The difficult, broken sentences showed that her strength was giving out. She seemed to feel herself sinking, but before she succumbed to the numbness that was stealing over her, she forced herself to a final effort of speech.

"Hazel—your man. Love . . . he told me so."

Sharply Sir Clement turned away. His only hope was that Hazel had not heard, or if she had, that she would take the words for the ramblings of delirium.

And indeed, as far as it would seem, Hazel had heard nothing. Her head was nestling closely to her dying sister's, and there was more the look of death on her face than there was on Sallie's. Sir Clement shrank from reflecting on the thoughts that must be racing through her brain. What part did he play in their bitterness and hopeless regret? Oh, no doubt, a very great, a very important part. And in due time would come the reckoning. And when he had abased himself and groveled at her feet in the abjectness of his contrition, she would send him away, with the words of her scorn ringing in his ears forevermore. But he was ready for it.

Sallie's fingers no longer fumbled, there was no more quick fluttering of the breath. She had sunk into coma. So she lay for some time, and then Sir Clement knew what the soft rattling sound in her throat betokened. And all at once she sat up, flung her arms wide, cried the one word: "Mother!" and fell back. Was it his fancy? He seemed to hear a gently swishing whir as of soft wings that went on their outward journey.

After a minute or two he tapped Hazel on the shoulder.

"Come, Hazel," he said.

He uttered the Christian name easily, naturally, as if death, which sweeps away everything, had swept away all

constraint, all formality. But she did not move. She just kept as she was, soundless, motionless, her lips to the cold face.

And there she remained, with her newly found sister, all the time up to the funeral, watching her dead. Mrs. Cripps brought her food which she did not touch. On the morning after next Sir Clement helped once more to carry a coffin down those stairs. On the pavement stood the usual crowd of gaping quidnuncs. Mrs. Cripps was decent enough to indulge in her hysterics upstairs. Cripps himself caught and detained Sir Clement for a moment.

"Here you are, Tiny," he said, holding out to him the ten-pound note.

"You've had expenses," said Sir Clement, "the doctor and so on."

"Doctor was a 'panel' chap and I wouldn't break into it for the sake of the telegram."

"It's yours, Cripps. Thank God there's one honest man in the world. And, I say, Cripps, I won't forget you."

Sir Clement, fighting, as it were, for breath, signed the driver to start. He gazed round, taking his last look of Paradise Lane. Everybody seemed to die here—Mrs. Marsh, Curley, Sallie, all dead. His memories of it were the only things that would not die.

And now again he was in the cemetery he remembered so well. Again he stood by an open grave, but he would have given half his life if he could have stood there with the semi-indifference he had felt at that earlier funeral. For, it struck him, to what extent was he responsible for this grave? Would there have been a grave if he had not been pursued by a grim fate that made him strew death and disaster in his path through the world?

He waited till Hazel rose. Oh, how good if the world were suddenly to become paralyzed into a standstill, as

he stood thus, if the business of life were to run out while she was kneeling there. Nothing more to be said, nothing more to be done, but utter petrifaction of body and brain. He tore himself from his futilities with a sob and gently took her by the arm.

"Come, Hazel, now I will lead you to your mother."

CHAPTER XII

THE HANDKISS

THEY were sitting again in the train. The landscape unrolled itself before them, a panorama of Elysian peace. Sweet was the scent of the new-mown sheaves, musical the sound of the lowing kine. And the peasant-folk went stolidly, solemnly about their tasks, as if the world did not have three days of nightmare behind it. He thought of his untroubled existence on the karoo, of the agreeably toilsome daylight hours, of the wholesomely restful nights. If only with a great backward leap he could be amongst it all again! All that he had deemed vexation or distress would dwindle to nothing. It would be a life of Nirvana, of lotus-eating. If that dread something had not happened he might be living there now, the happiest of men, instead of having this conflagration of calamity roaring around him.

He had seen her looking at him several times, as if wishing to speak. Did the grimness of his face deter her? But he knew that this silence could not go on. There were things that had to be said, and delay only made them more difficult.

"I don't know what you are thinking of me, what you are calling me in your heart," he began. "If you would say that I am a criminal blunderer and nothing more, you would be letting me down lightly."

She sat up and looked at him in astonishment.

"Why, Sir Clement, those are strange words!"

"I ought to have known," he went on. "It never does for a man to play at Providence."

"To whom have you been playing at Providence?"

"To your dead sister and to you."

"Yes," she said, still vaguely, "but the motive is everything."

So she was going to humble him with commonplaces!

"No," he replied harshly. "It's the result that counts. You see the result. It's brilliant."

"You forget, Sir Clement, that I know little or nothing about it."

Yes, that was it. She really did not know much—yet. And now he would have to place himself in the pillory and make himself the target of her scorn, her bitter reproach. And, somehow, he exulted in the thought. He plunged abruptly into his story.

"I came upon your sister through the ordinary channels. A friend of yours, actuated, of course, by the most laudable motives, had asked me to find her. You were anxious for it."

She nodded assent.

"You saw the place where she had lived. She had been there, as I told you, for years. She had come to it at an age when her mind was malleable, quick to take impressions. And she had grown into it, had become flesh of its flesh and bone of its bone. I saw it would not be easy to uproot her, but I made the attempt and thought I was succeeding. But duplicity was the life and soul of her element. The complexity of her nature was entirely beyond my grasp."

"That's hardly your fault," she observed quietly.

"I should have doubted my capacity to cope with her. She gave me enough cause to doubt it. I shouldn't have meddled with what I perhaps did not understand. And I

see that I never understood her. I had no idea that she could be so small and yet so great. And least of all did I have any inkling of the depths of her feelings. I thought she was a butterfly, and she was a Sphinx."

She looked out, her eyes still heavy with grief, but tinged already with a filmy glamor of resignation. She did not interrupt him.

"And now you will ask me," he went on, dispassionate, matter-of-fact, as if he were telling her an everyday story, "you will ask me why I waited so long. And that is perhaps the only part of the business where I do not show up so absurd. She wasn't ripe for you. She was impossible. After the first gladness of the reunion there would have been disappointment, discord, unhappiness. There was nothing in which she would have seen eye to eye with you. She was a wild young colt, and you could never have held her in tether. And if she came to you as she was, as I found her, she would have broken away and you would have lost her again."

"Yes, and the second time, I suppose, it would have been for good," she said pensively.

"There was no reason for precipitating matters," he continued, as if she had not spoken. "As your friend put it to me, you had waited so long and could afford to wait a little longer. And I thought you would be repaid for the waiting. I was doing my best to make her worthy of being your sister."

"Yes, that was noble of you, Sir Clement, that was quite the right thing to do. I don't see how you could have acted otherwise. You can't be blamed that she foiled your good intentions. You couldn't have known. But,"—she leant forward and fixed him with a look that probed him to the core—"what did she mean by saying that hers was the better way?"

"Oh, that referred to something of no consequence," he said uneasily.

"If you won't give me a straight answer, then let me ask you—why did she kill herself?"

He started back and set his teeth grimly. No, that he would never tell her. Never should the poor soul's memory be sullied by that sordid revelation. It was a secret he would take to the grave with him.

"I asked you whether you knew what had driven her to that desperate step," she insisted when she saw that he remained silent.

It was too late to draw back, to fob her off with a negative. She knew that he knew.

"As far as I can tell," he replied at last, "it was a misguided act of self-sacrifice. She wanted to get me out of a difficulty. Something had passed between us."

"What had passed between you?"

"I had made her angry."

"You made her angry? How?"

"Oh, a mere trifle."

"Trifle? One does not die for trifles. You had no right to provoke her to that extent. You are a man, able to judge issues, and she was a mere child."

He sat in stony silence.

"I don't know why you want to wipe out all that you have to your credit," she said with heightened color and flashing eyes. "You refuse to tell me. I suppose it's something you're ashamed of, something you dare not speak about. I have a right to know what sent my sister to her death."

He would have to tell her, even at the risk of making her think better of him, a thing he was not at all anxious to do.

"I am sorry you force me to give you an answer," he

said calmly. "She asked me for something I could not grant her for her sake nor for my own. I don't want you to think harshly of her for it. Things had a different meaning in her world. I don't know if that explanation is sufficient for you."

She had fallen back with a little gasp. It was some time before she spoke again.

"And yet you admitted to her that you were willing to marry her. Was there any reason for that?"

"Pardon me," he said with some spirit, "that's a matter which concerns me and not your sister. Therefore, I presume, I may keep that to myself."

She looked away from him as she said:

"Yes, she said you were in love with some one else—I didn't quite follow her."

"I would rather not go into that."

His heart had given a bound of immense gratitude. So Sallie's dying indiscretion had passed her by, and that secret of his, at least, was safe.

"No," she said, shaking her head sadly, "it was wrong of me to ask you anything. What does it matter? Not all the questions and answers in the world will bring her back to life again."

"I answered you all I could," he said stubbornly.

"Yes, that was very good of you."

"It was owing to you."

They were passing the last station or two before Woodlands.

"Sir Clement," she said suddenly, "don't let us ever speak of this again."

"That will be entirely as you wish, Hazel."

"And because I shall never mention it again, I must here say a few words and be done with it. Looking at it from any point of view, I can only see that you acted as honor-

ably, as kindly, as wisely as any man could have done. It all totals up to one thing, that you tried to give me back my sister. I am almost more sorry for you than for myself that you failed. It is so galling to fail."

"Hazel!" he said dully.

"But you did not fail, not altogether," she went on, the tears trickling down her cheeks. "You have achieved something for me for which I can never thank you enough. I was with her at least two days. They will be red-letter days to me for the remainder of my life. We were such good friends. Not an unkind word passed between us. We saw eye to eye in everything. Is it not a great thing to enrich oneself with a beautiful memory?"

"Hazel!" he said again, this time chokingly.

"If my gratitude is worth anything to you, Sir Clement, take it, oh, please take it. Don't make me out so poor a thing that I have nothing worth the giving."

She dried her eyes quickly, for they had nearly arrived.

"Poor mother, poor Salome! I am glad she heard me call her by that name again before she died. It seemed to please her. You told me to hope for the best—I'm not sure that it isn't all for the best. I once said I should feel happy to know them both safe in their graves. And now I know they are safe. And now I shall know where to go when I want to be with them. They will always be at home to me."

The last words had come out with a rush. And then, all at once, she stooped quickly and, before he could prevent her, kissed him on the hand.

"You will have to take a holiday," he said, as they walked out of the station.

"No, thank you. I don't need one. To-morrow I shall be back at my post. In my work I shall forget."

He saw her to the cottage and left her, still, as it were,

chewing the cud of his surprise. For her kiss tingled on his hand.

A feeling of great relief had come over him, almost a joy. But, pessimist that he was, he could only look on them as the fore-runner of a still greater affliction.

PART III
THE BOOK OF LIFE



CHAPTER I

KEN TALKS TO CHARLEY

SIR CLEMENT had driven to the station to meet Ken, and presently he saw Ken jump from the train, looking fit as a fiddle, with a tan on him an inch deep.

"Have you got him?" were the first words Sir Clement said, as they clasped hands.

Ken shook his head in negation of the question and in disapproval of the questioner.

"That's a disappointment," said Sir Clement, pulling a long face.

"Gracious, Clem, does it mean all that to you? You look like a superannuated ghost and your beard is shot with gray. A man your age! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I've had some trouble," said Sir Clement curtly.

"That's nothing new for you."

And he stood waiting for further information.

"Oh, about that another time," Sir Clement addressed him testily. "Why haven't you brought him?"

"Because there was nothing to bring. Couldn't find the beggar."

"Couldn't find him? Ken, you're always so reliable."

"Well, then, this is the exception that proves the rule," replied Ken, also getting somewhat ruffled. "You can be sure I did my best. When I'm sent on an errand, I'm not keen on making it a wild goose chase. I've had two hundred niggers working on that cabbage-patch for a month,

and the ground thereabouts ought to grow four crops a year. But it didn't grow any corpses."

"I suppose you struck the right locality. Charley told me positively he's there. I asked him twice."

"Of course I struck the right spot. And devil of a job I had to get there too. Everything worked out correctly as far as the sketch-plan was concerned. I found the log-house, a tumble-down affair, stripped to the plaster. I had it made habitable and lived in it so as to be close to the work.

"And no trace of him?"

"None."

Sir Clement had become thoughtful.

"Then I don't believe they buried him at all. Charley said that they became squiffy. I think they made short work of him and dropped him down the ravine."

"I attended to the gully as well. I let a couple of blacks down, and promised them a fiver each if they brought me up a white man in any condition whatsoever. The place was bone-dry and they raked it from end to end. The nearest they could get to it was the skeleton of a hyena, which they brought back with them and asked if it would do as well. As a matter of fact, Clem, if you want to know the truth, I never meant to bring him home at all. If I had found him I was going to cable you that the steamship people had other use for their cold storage and have him buried out there. Plenty of cemeteries doing a flourishing business in Capetown. That ought to have done for you quite as well."

"You haven't brought him, Ken, so there's an end to that. Well, it doesn't matter."

"It matters a great deal if you say it in that tone of voice, dear old chap. Now, Clem, get a hold on yourself.

Pull yourself together. Come on, let's take a spin to Grey Monk's Head and back."

"Can't, Ken. I've got to get home. I'm expecting the brother. He's about due to-day."

Ken frowned. Then he said suddenly:

"Clem, will you let me see him instead of you? I could do the business just as well."

"Yes, you might," Sir Clement answered readily, almost eagerly. "I'm not too anxious to have truck with him. Last time the spook came was on the day I saw Charley. Some form of metaphysical projection, I suppose." He paused for a moment and then proceeded rather shamefacedly: "Ken, if you don't mind, I'll sleep in your room to-night."

Ken whistled.

"Jingo, has it come to that?"

"Yes, Ken. The hag is riding me hard."

"Then we'll have to jolt her out of the saddle. Clem, I'll tell you what we will do. We'll chuck the whole kaboodle and get out into the open. In the place where you've been and where I've just come from there's splendid hunting. Big game, as you know. The hobgoblins won't dare to follow us there—it'll be too dangerous for them. Jove, what sport! It was a mere toss-up whether I came back or not, Clem."

And the blood-lust of the born shikaree flamed up in his eyes.

Sir Clement shook his head with a tired smile.

"No, Ken, it's against my principles. I've done all the killing I'm ever going to do. Don't I know what it is, how it makes the blood sing? But there's something in me that won't let me. Self-defense, yes, that's different. Ken, I've stared a lion out of countenance and then rid-

dled the brute as he sprang at me. But I don't want any more opportunities of that sort."

"Hm, that's a pity," said Ken regretfully. "But you'll have to do something, Clem. You can't go on like this. Getting afraid of your own company? Well, what next?"

"I'm thinking it over, Ken," said Sir Clement slowly. "I've got an idea of something that may help. There'll be no harm in trying it."

"In what direction, approximately?"

"A monastery, Ken. My mother was a Roman Catholic. I loved my mother very much."

Ken laughed derisively.

"A splendid idea—splendid! The great Sir Clement Barradine in cassock and cowl, with a hair-shirt underneath! No, Clem, I'll never stand by and see you bury yourself alive."

"The day may come when you will beg it of me."

"Holy smoke! What the blazes has happened? The devil must have had high jinks while I was away," cried Ken fiercely.

"He has. The bill is mounting up. The fresh wrong I did the party I wronged has absolved me from. But I can't forgive myself."

"No, it seems you never forgive yourself for anything."

"Exactly. That's how my punishment works out."

They got back to the Priory.

"Ken," said Sir Clement on leaving him, "when you see Charley, don't forget to ask him about the grave."

"You bet I won't."

Ken could not disguise from himself that he felt great anxiety. That Clem was in a parlous condition was obvious. He had seen men drift to the asylum on less strong premonitory hallucinations. And this damnable new complication, whatever it was. Rotten luck! So the best

men went to the wall. It might indeed turn out as Clem had said and his friends might in the end be sorry that it was not seclusion in a cassock instead of seclusion in a strait-waistcoat. It was inconceivable that such splendid manhood should be allowed to be wasted. Help must come from somewhere. And Ken clenched his hands in impotent rage as he thought of his own helplessness.

His reflections had harried him into no very equable frame of mind when he was told that Charley had come. If the hound had not started the trouble, he had at any rate aggravated it. Ken could quite understand how the visible manifestation of anything connected with his misfortune would affect Clem. And this outrageous fellow came deliberately to remind him of something which by all the powers of earth and heaven he should be given a chance of forgetting.

Charley looked sleek and prosperous, exuding the pride of a white waistcoat and spats. But alas, his face wore a besotted look and he smelt vilely of drink. His oily complacency of manner infuriated Ken.

"What do you want?" he shouted at him.

"I've come to see Sir Clement," Charley answered softly.

"Well, you can't see him," rasped Ken.

"Can't? Isn't he here?"

"That's none of your business, damn your impertinence. I'm here instead of him. He gave me the check for you. Here."

"Yes, that's all right. But can't I speak to Sir Clement for a minute? We're such old friends."

"Then the friendship has lasted long enough and it's time it was pensioned off. You won't see Sir Clement today, and you'll never see him again. And all I can tell you is—keep away from him."

"What, is he crying off?" asked Charley in alarm.

"Sir Clement never cries off. He'll keep to his word, though if I had my way, he would never have entered into this rotten bargain. Thank your lucky stars he never asked my advice."

"Dear, dear," said Charley, greatly relieved, "I wish he hadn't sent me such a fierce man to deal with."

"Fierce? So far, dear boy, I've been talking to you as a mother to her babe. But if you get my dander up, you'll see stars. You know that Sir Clement is a sentimental sort of chap and you traded on it. Else he'd never have started this mug's game. He would just have wrung your neck quietly and flung you on the nearest dung-heap. And I'm not sure that I won't do him that little favor."

"He said he liked to feel he had an accomplice. And an accomplice usually implies guilt," said Charley, mustering up a little spirit.

"I don't believe he ever said it. And if he did, it's neither here nor there. Sir Clement has certain views about your brother's death which an idiot like you would never understand. If he wanted to fight the case he's strong enough to knock you all of a heap. If he won't fight it it's for reasons which concern him alone. However, I've wasted enough good breath on you. Understand clearly that you're never to show up here again. If you do, I'll set the whole kennel on you."

"Then how am I to get the money?" asked Charley sullenly.

"It'll be sent to you. Give me your address."

"Send it poste restante."

"I'll do no such thing. I've a fancy for sending it to the place where you live. I don't want you to hurt your poor feet running forwards and backwards to the post-office. You see I'm not as bad as I look."



"But I don't live anywhere," protested Charley. "I'm always shifting about. Not used to sitting still."

"Then you'll have to get into the habit. You give me the address where to send the money to, or you go without."

"And suppose I split?"

"Do your damnedest. Nothing would please me more."

"Oh, I've got nothing to make a secret of, whatever may be the case with other people," said Charley loftily. "I'll give you the address. 23 St. Andrews' Street, Coventry."

Ken noted it down in his pocketbook.

"This way out," he said, holding the door open officiously.

CHAPTER II

CHARLEY WEEPS AND SLEEPS

It will be observed that Ken had omitted to ask Charley about his brother's grave. But it was not an oversight. Ken did not go in for oversights. If he had given Charley so much of his valuable time, he did it for the motive of establishing connections with Charley that might be useful later on. Ken went in for motives.

Charley walked down the road, leaning heavily on his stick. Not so much because of the weight of his thoughts. He was not thinking at all. Ken's icy, incisive words had for the time being cold-douched his brain. But now, with the sweltering heat of the midsummer sun and the drowsy buzz of the afternoon, he fell back into his fuddled state.

He felt moreover very sad and morose. Sir Clement had never been particularly affable to him, though he himself had always held out the glad hand and had been quite prepared to accept an invitation to make a stay at the Priory. But Sir Clement had been honey and poppy-seed to this savage man he had just encountered. And then the humiliation of it. Not to be allowed to see Sir Clement again. To be kept at arm's length, as though he were a leper. And Charley felt the moisture gather in his bleared eyes. Surely he was the most ill-used and worst-understood man on the face of the earth.

It was thus that he was met by Jocelyn, who had been lying in wait for him.

"Hullo, Mr. Almanac!" Jocelyn greeted him cheerily.

Charley looked up with a glad gleam in his eyes. The friendly voice was as balm to his wounded feelings.

"Hullo, young sir," he replied readily. "Oh, you're Sir Clement's cousin, aren't you?"

"And nothing to be proud of, as we agreed last time," jested Jocelyn.

But Charley at the moment thought otherwise. He suffered Jocelyn gladly. It was something, some form of amends, to be dealt with tenderly by at least one member of the family.

"Just had your friendly little chat, talked about old times, and parted with expressions of mutual esteem, eh, what?" asked Jocelyn.

"Damned if we did," replied Charley, aggrieved. "Couldn't get a word with him at all. Wouldn't see me. Somebody must have been making mischief between us. He sent that other fellow to talk to me."

"Oh, Mr. Hobhouse."

"Hoghouse, is that his confounded name? And a good name too. He's a proper hog, and don't you forget it."

"That's funny. Loaded you off on Hobby, did he? And Sir Clement is, as a rule, so accessible to everybody. However, we've all got our humors. By the way, I'm just walking down to the 'White Hart.' Is that at all in your direction?"

"Rather. My mouth is like a lime-kiln."

"Well, then, come along, Mr.—Mr.—it's curious, we're such old acquaintances and I don't know your name."

"Charley Dallas," was the ready response. "Call me Charley. Everybody calls me Charley, even Sir Clement."

"Certainly, Charley."

They strode along, Jocelyn holding the other tenderly by the arm, for Charley gave occasionally a heavy lurch.

The bar-parlor of the "White Hart" was empty. They made themselves comfortable.

"Well, chin, chin, Charley—here's good luck," cried Jocelyn as they clinked pewters.

Charley drained his at a gulp and set it down.

"What, call this a drink?" he asked disdainfully. "Why, it's no more than a sip."

"We'll make that all right in a jiffy," said Jocelyn, walking up to the potman. "Here, Harry, trundle us in a small barrel, and we won't have to keep you running your legs off."

The barrel came, was lugged on to the table, and placed conveniently for Charley to get at the tap. And Charley made a busy and efficient tapster.

"So you've got important business with Sir Clement," remarked Jocelyn with the most casual air in the world.

"Important enough for him," replied Charley with some vehemence. "We'll see who'll get the better of it if he does the dirty on me. Asking me to do my damnedest and all that. Well, I will."

"Quite right, Charley. Don't take anything lying down. Go for him and I'll help you. I like you, you've got an honest face. I hate to see a decent man done down."

At this point Charley, touched to the quick by such sympathy, and having filled and re-filled his pewter many times, became lachrymose.

"To rob me of the best brother I ever had, though I never had more than one," he sobbed. "And then, by Jingo, to make a fuss over a paltry thousand a year."

Jocelyn saw he was on the right road. He patted Charley solicitously on the back.

"Drink up, man, and forget your troubles. But that was a nasty thing to do, to rob a man of his only brother. How did it happen?"

"Killed him stone dead. And then took to his heels."

Jocelyn retained his equilibrium by a miracle. This was indeed startling news, quite worth a barrel of beer, in fact a whole brewery.

"Bad luck that, if ever. Poor Charley! Did they quarrel?"

"About the sharing of the profits. They were all alone in the loghouse, with not another white man within a dozen miles. When we came in the morning, me and the Scruncher and Flipp, we found him in a pool of blood, his head battered in, yes, dead as a doornail."

"Indeed, indeed! How very sad. And now he's paying you—compensation. How does he pay you, cash or check?"

"Check, every quarter. Dirt cheap too for such a good brother. Poor Will, poor old Will!"

"Will, was that his name? All right, Charley, don't take on so. I'll make it all right again for you between him and you. You're a tender-hearted chap, Charley, to keep friends with him after what he's done to you. And to be satisfied with a few miserable pounds in place of a brother. That's magnanimous if you like. I'll put it properly to Sir Clement. I'll have a serious talk with him. I don't think he'll quite like my interfering, but I'll do it for your sake, old boy."

Charley's maudlin weeping had subsided, his head sank lower and lower, till it rested on his arms on the table, and presently a gentle snore told Jocelyn that a merciful slumber had enwrapped his grief.

Jocelyn sprang to his feet, his fists clenched, his shoulders well pulled back. A snarl disfigured his handsome mouth. He looked the sinister menace that was in him. For the moment he felt hotly the indignity of the grand old name of Barradine passing into the keeping of such

a one as he who held it now. An outlaw, an evil-doer who had put himself beyond the pale of society. A smug hypocrite, who flaunted the mask of a high morality and laughed at those whom he deceived.

But that thought, which to some extent did credit to Jocelyn, soon vanished and gave place to a consideration of the base purposes to which he could put his knowledge. The one great fact was established—Clement was in his grip. He held in his hand a sword of Damocles to be kept poised over him and brought crashing down on him at will. When was he to use that tremendous weapon? Not lightly, not casually, but at some moment when Clement was, arbitrarily or otherwise, exercising the power he thought was still in him. Jocelyn pictured to himself that great moment, when he would take the proud strong man by the throat and force him to his knees. And he would show him no mercy, ruthless in the mock-righteousness of the vicious who think they have found some one more vicious than themselves.

What terms was he to exact from Clement? He knew he could ask anything he wanted—everything was within his reach. That could be left for later. Sufficient for the day was the goodness thereof. He fondled the notion of the great occasion when he would stand over a whining, abject Clement as the omnipotent master of the situation. He toyed with it as a dog plays with his bone in a cache. And he did not know that his great occasion was ripening more rapidly than he thought.

He paid for the barrel of beer and went out. He cast back one last look at Charley and spat out at sight of the snoring beast who had made him a king. Charley, the king-maker—Jocelyn could not help laughing at the supremely absurd conceit.

About the same time Hazel and Tabitha were talking in their sitting-room and now there was not much left to say. For the first time Hazel had given her friend a full account of what had passed in Paradise Lane. Tabitha, being a woman of great discretion, when she chose, had not pressed her for it, but had left Hazel to gang her own gait, waiting for her. The sorrowful story had made less demand on Hazel than Tabitha had expected. It almost seemed that from under its pathos there rang out a counter-balancing, consolatory note. Tabitha did not try to investigate the essence of it, but merely said:

"Has Sir Clement told you anything about his movements?"

"No," replied Hazel, and added quietly: "He did not say much at all to me to-day."

"I was longing to ask him myself, but he did not seem in the mood for answering questions. I hope, though, he'll stay now. He looked better than he did the other morning, but . . ." Tabitha stopped significantly. "However, looking well or ill, it's a comfort to have him back again at Woodlands."

"I admit I missed him greatly while he was away," said Hazel dreamily.

Those were words that Tabitha had been waiting to hear.

"Did you? And what would Jocelyn say to that?"

Hazel's mouth hardened.

"Is it all off between you and Jocelyn?" Tabitha asked again.

"I don't know how we stand," said Hazel with puckered brows. "The night before he left I had a straight talk with him. I gave him my ultimatum. I told him the terms on which he could consider me as still bound to him."

"And very proper terms too," said Miss Witherspoon severely. "Work and a home."

"As you know, he hasn't written me a line since he's been away. Sulking. He has a genius for sulking. He is nursing his offended dignity and thinks that will raise him in my estimation. I've not seen him since he's back, but, of course, we won't be able to help meeting."

"Then don't you want to meet him, Hazel?"

Hazel was silent for a moment, then suddenly seized the older woman's hand in an access of fear.

"Something tells me that I ought to keep aloof from him," she cried. "There's a feeling in me—it's been there for a long time—that he's playing some sideways game, that he's harboring a hidden purpose. Oh, I don't want to wrong him. There was a time when I loved him very much, even if . . ."

She broke off and buried her face in her hands.

"Even if you don't love him quite so much now," Tabitha finished the sentence for her. "Well, that's hardly your fault. Would you like things to come right between you again, Hazel?" she asked cunningly.

Hazel flung up her hands with a despairing cry.

"Oh, I wish he were half the man his cousin is!"

"Half the man, and half the gentleman," said Tabitha. "Don't forget the gentleman, Hazel."

CHAPTER III

THE WORM THAT TURNED

GREAT doings at the school. The excitement was intense and the look of happy expectancy on the faces of the children would have softened the heart of the most inveterate old misanthropist. Miss Witherspoon tore about in a fever of agitation, seeming to be in half a dozen different places at once and never really knowing exactly where she was. For to-morrow fell the crowning grace of the school-year, the picnic in honor of the Harvest Festival.

"Where are the rosettes, Hazel, in heaven's name where are the rosettes? If they are lost I am a ruined woman. There's no time to make others."

"Here, Tabitha," said Hazel, going up to Miss Witherspoon's cupboard and calmly extracting them from one of the drawers.

"Oh, you angel! What on earth would I do without you? I don't know what will happen to me when you get married."

"I shall never get married, Tab, dear."

"That's just what I said when I was your age, and the men took me at my word. But there, I won't go in for comparisons which are sure to be odious to you."

Hazel laughed and gave the dear old thing an affectionate hug. Miss Witherspoon suddenly quietened down.

"Hazel, I never thought of it. I am making all the arrangements, taking it for granted that you are coming."

"Of course I'm coming. Why shouldn't I?"

"Child, won't all the noise and gayety be too much for you? I know how tender you must still feel."

"My duty is with the children. I suppose it won't matter if I come in black?"

"Not if you come in vermilion, with zebra stripes all over you," said Miss Witherspoon, kissing her lovingly.

The weather was kind. The sun rose on a perfect and constant day. Sir Clement thought it a great nuisance, but there was no help for it. He would have to put in an appearance. The picnic was held in his grounds and it would be churlish to the children not to pay them the courtesy of his presence. He was not sure whether Hazel would be there. He had only seen her once since his return. He had met Tabitha since, but she, being in great haste, had not stopped. But the look she gave him would have conveyed much to him had he noticed it.

As soon as he reached the bustling scene he saw her, Hazel not Tabitha, trim and dainty in her simple black gown. He did not know whether to be glad or sorry that she was there. Almost immediately her glance met his—he might almost have fancied she had been looking out for him. It sent to him a message of friendly recognition, of mute understanding, he might have said. He did not go up to her, but stood away, to some extent in concealment, so that he might watch her undisturbed.

But he was not left long unmolested. People came and spoke to him and he had to give them his polite attention. The picnic was more numerously attended than usual. Many of the neighboring great people had come, for word had gone forth that Sir Clement would be there, and as he was still almost a stranger to the whole county, curiosity had been a great impetus.

Said Lady Angela Templeton to her bosom friend, the Hon. Sylvia Dacre:

"Oh, look, there's Sir Clement! Isn't he old!"

"Thirty-seven," the Hon. Sylvia informed her promptly.

"Twenty years older than me," said Lady Angela ungrammatically.

"Only seventeen years my senior," remarked the Hon. Sylvia with the sedateness of a ripe matron.

"Think he's handsome?" asked Lady Angela.

"Oh, yes. I rather like that rugged type."

And then the two looked at each other, wondering whether each knew what was in the other's mind. For both Lady Angela and the Hon. Sylvia had been dragged there by their mothers who had told them it was their duty to meet Sir Clement. They had noticed much whispering on the subject in the family circle, had overheard one or two incautious remarks, and were aware that the Templeton and Dacre fortunes were both greatly attenuated, while the Barradine estates were full-fed and plump. Consequently they were both determined to do their duty heroically.

The two mothers, each desperately striving to forestall the other, had just captured Sir Clement, preferring to go halves rather than surrender him each to the other.

"My daughter, Sir Clement."

"Charmed."

"*My* daughter, Sir Clement."

"Delighted."

And then he turned away and began to play with the kiddies.

The remarks of Lady Angela and the Hon. Sylvia, together with those of their respective mothers, are not worth while setting down here.

The fun was at its height. And then came the great event of the day, the choriambic display arranged for the children which had cost Miss Witherspoon so many sleep-

less nights and despairing rehearsals. The chief feature was the maypole dance. Very pretty it looked, but to Sir Clement there was only one figure in it. It was Hazel, who led the revels. She indeed made it the music of motion. She was a hamadryad, a free child of the woods, and her turns and gestures were the apotheosis of unfettered grace. And all the more wonderful it seemed to Sir Clement, knowing, as he did, the hidden ache that pulsed under that abandonment to an outward ecstasy. For she had thrown herself into it with all her heart and soul. She would not damp the children's pleasure. It was so like her, thought Sir Clement.

But she had another beholder who watched her with more than interest, one might almost say with fascination—the Rev. Ambrose Fotheringham. He could not decide whether he admired her more for the spiritual fervor that haloed her face as she sang God's praise in church, or now, as in a seeming exuberance of physical delight she trilled out the old-world ditty:

"Come, lasses and lads,
Leave your mothers and dads,
And away to the maypole hie!"

In either rôle she was beautiful beyond words, whether as saint or Bacchant. If things could have happened otherwise, if there were no such things as ambition, or the desire for worldly advancement, who knows in what direction one would have let one's fancy roam? Such thoughts, argued the Rev. Ambrose casuistically, were no treason to the opulent Josephine. She was not there yet, and it was only a tribute to the worship of the beautiful that in her absence one should console one's eyes with the next best thing.

Jocelyn also had not come. Sir Clement was waiting

for him. It really did not matter, but he felt a secret desire to form an opinion how things stood between him and Hazel. And at that moment he arrived, escorting Josephine and Mrs. Hobhouse.

Sir Clement looked about for a means of escape, but already it was too late, and Mrs. Hobhouse swooped down upon him, while the Rev. Ambrose hastened towards Josephine on the fleet wings of love.

"So sorry we are late, Sir Clement," purred Mrs. Hobhouse. "But that abominable dressmaker! Of course I could not do less than have a new gown for the occasion, and she had the trimmings on all wrong. Can you imagine such stupidity? That comes of encouraging local talent. I shall never do it again. Two mortal hours she kept me waiting while she made the alterations. Fancy bringing it at the last minute! I could have died of annoyance."

Sir Clement, despite all his preoccupation, could not help giving a passing thought to the two hours of purgatory for that unhappy dressmaker. He almost had it in his heart to rush off to her and assure her that life was still worth living, despite the impression she might have brought away from Mrs. Hobhouse.

"But, really, you're quite in good time, Mrs. Hobhouse," he said to her dryly.

"Oh, yes, as far as you are concerned I needn't have come at all," said the lady with pouting reproach. "You have been avoiding us. I scarcely have seen anything of you since the election."

"Yes, and that reminds me, I haven't yet congratulated you on the result."

"Don't be so sarcastic, Sir Clement. I suppose it rankles. But you have no one to blame except yourself. Only, I haven't despaired of you. I know that sooner or later you will find grace and come back to us."

"In spirit I have never been away from you, Mrs. Hobhouse."

"How charming! Now I recognize my dear Sir Clement again. Are you going to bear with us for some little time now?"

"I have no immediate intention of going away again."

"How nice! Then we shall be seeing something of you?"

"Most probably. What a pretty scene!"

She raised her lorgnette and swept round the place as though in a kind of surprise that she was expected to take notice of it.

"I see Miss Middleton is in mourning. Whom has she lost, the mother or the sister."

"I can't tell you. Perhaps both."

"I asked her and she was positively rude. She said she preferred not to talk about it. I don't know whether it is exactly the best taste in her to parade her bereavement and bring up reminiscences."

"If she refused you information, I don't blame her," he said harshly. "It's entirely her own business and it doesn't seem a sign of sympathy to remind her of the past. I think it's wonderfully brave of her to wear mourning, knowing how it will set tongues wagging."

"But, gracious, Sir Clement, my tongue never wags!"

"I didn't say yours, but there are many ill-natured people in the world."

"Yes, more's the pity," sighed Mrs. Hobhouse. "She ought to be proud that she has found such a champion in you. But, really, it's not worth while discussing. I have something much more important to say to you."

"You alarm me, Mrs. Hobhouse."

"Oh, it's not quite as bad as that. But I think I ought to warn you that you are in somebody's black books.

Josephine is disconsolate about you. You entirely dropped the question of the bazaar, without even a word of explanation, although she had already gone to the trouble of making all the preliminary arrangements. She vowed she would never speak to you again. But I'll see what I can do in the way of helping you to make your peace with her. Josephine, dear!" she called, "Sir Clement wants to talk to you."

Thus collared, Sir Clement had to yield with the best of grace. Courtesy demanded that he should walk up to Josephine, but before he had taken more than a few steps, she was already upon him, leaving the Rev. Ambrose flabbergasted by her sudden desertion. Mrs. Hobhouse moved off to greet her many friends. Josephine bowed coldly.

"How do you do, Sir Clement?"

"Awfully good of you to take notice of me, Miss Clavering."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Shall we stroll?"

"It's very pleasant here," he replied shortly.

"So it is," she said, biting her rouged lips. "I hope mother has not been taking you to task on my account."

"No, she left that to you."

"I wouldn't dream of calling you over the coals, although I have every right," she said with a touch of austerity. "You will see that I can be very forgiving. The truth is," she went on, with an outburst of archness, "I can't afford to quarrel with you, Sir Clement."

"Then I'm very fortunate."

"Indeed, my head is bursting with schemes for which I need your powerful aid. And even more the benefit of your great wisdom. I want to consult with you on so many things."

"You will find yourself leaning on a broken reed, Miss Clavering."

"Modesty, Sir Clement, modesty. Now that you have effected such wonderful improvements in the village, it will require little more to make this place a veritable Garden of Eden."

"Yes, only the serpent, I suppose. Have you any snakes round here, Miss Clavering?"

"How horrid of you to jest, Sir Clement, when I feel so earnest about it. Don't you think it would be a splendid thing to establish a Coöperative Society? I have already approached several members of the parochial Council, and they are most favorably inclined to it."

"There's no reason why there shouldn't be a Coöperative Society. But I should strongly advise you to keep to the rural Councilors. They're likely to have much more experience in the selling of bacon than I have."

"Oh, those men! They're so stodgy, so conservative."

"And since when are you a Radical, Miss Clavering?" He could not forbear to dig at her slyly.

"Oh, don't remind me of that horrible election. It was a perfect nightmare to me. I was eating my heart out with vexation. But I was powerless. I couldn't fall out with all my best friends. I wish I could have helped you. I'm sure the result would have been different. You seem to have been poorly served by your helpers."

"Yes, you would have been a host in yourself," he replied, knowing the particular helpers she was referring to. Miss Clavering was one of those charitable people who never passed by a chance of getting in a taunt at her enemies. But just now she had a suspicion that he was spoofing her and quickly got back to neutral ground.

"But as to that Society. Experience isn't everything. In all social undertakings imagination plays a great part. That's where you would come in, Sir Clement."

"But even I can't imagine bacon and beans where none exist."

"You can make your thoughts a reality."

"Then you don't want imagination. You want money."

"I want both. Five thousand pounds would start the Society on a solid basis."

"Please don't think me rude, Miss Clavering, but perhaps this isn't the best time and place to discuss such serious questions. We must find a more suitable opportunity and then I shall listen to you with pleasure."

"So that's a promise!" she cried ardently.

Too late he saw to what he had committed himself. Still, it could not be helped. Miss Clavering was not as pleasant to listen to as the purling of brooks or the melody of the Maypole dance, and her insincerity was prodigious. But he would spare her an odd half hour and pooh-pooh her politely. He could not, however, shake her off just yet, and she moved about alongside of him with a proprietory air which made a good augury for her mother.

The Rev. Ambrose observed it too, and when she came back to him, having at last given way to the local duke, he had become the proverbial worm that turned.

"Have you been talking to Sir Clement about me, Josephine?" he asked sternly.

"About you? Where do you come in?"

"Because unless it was to advocate my claims to the vicarage, of which there is really no further need, I can't see any reason why you should indulge in such an interminable confidential conversation with Sir Clement. I have scarcely had a word with you since you came, and now you give all your attention to a stranger. I am very hurt, Josephine, very hurt."

"Didums," she mocked him. "I don't think you have

any claims to my undivided attention as yet—Mr. Fotheringham."

His hand went to his heart as if she had stabbed him.

"Oh, don't call me that, Josephine!" he cried. "It makes me feel as if I had retrogressed a thousand miles and a thousand years."

"Serves you right for making a fuss about nothing at all," she said severely, rendered very cruel by the high hopes she had carried away from her talk with Sir Clement. "As yet you are not master of my actions, and I'm not sure that you ever will be."

"Josephine!" he groaned.

"I am very disappointed in you, Mr. Fotheringham. I took you for a high-minded, large-hearted man, and now I see that you cannot rise superior to the weakness I most abominate—jealousy. If it is like this now, what will it be when we—when we are married, if that ever should be? I see that you are utterly incapable of trust, that noblest feeling in a man, especially one who follows your vocation."

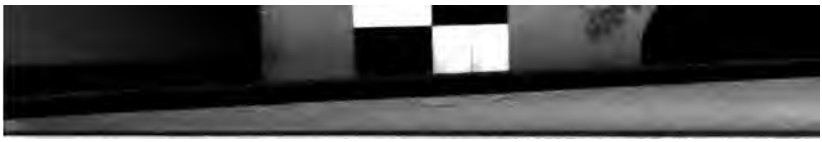
"Josephine!" he implored her, with a certain monotony.

"No, sir, no. It is too late. I gave you your chance of winning me. I would have been glad to be wooed and won, but it had to be by a knight in armor, not by a—by a . . ."

Words failed her to complete the sentence and she gave him her back. The Rev. Ambrose paralleled the movement. The worm had turned and been crushed under heel for his pains.

"Then all is over between us," he said funereally. "I shall never propose again. And the new proposal is about due."

Josephine grew nervous. She also had been diving in the Book of Proverbs and had fished out the one about a bird



in the hand. At the same time she reminded herself that she had been failing in obedience to her mother's injunction—to dangle the Rev. Ambrose. One could never tell how things might eventuate.

"Amby!" she called softly.

He faced about with a cry of joy.

"Josephine, did I hear you aright?"

"You are always asking that question, dear Ambrose. It's a reflection on my clearness of speech."

"Oh, no, no, dear Josephine," he assured her. "But it isn't often that I fancy I hear the angels talk."

"Oh, now I'm your angel."

"A whole heaven of them. Josephine, can you—will you forgive me?"

"Yes, but I will have to mete out to you a punishment."

"Oh, name it!"

"You will have to propose at least three times more."

"Could I do it all on the same day?"

"No. It must be done at decent intervals. Well, the incident is closed."

She thought of giving him her hand, but refrained. The Rev. Ambrose was foolish and impulsive enough for anything, and there were people looking.

CHAPTER IV

EMOTIONS IN FLUX

SIR CLEMENT had been watching Jocelyn. The young man had been strolling about moodily, with a curt word and nod here and there. So far he had kept away from Hazel, but as he walked about in ever-narrowing circles, it was evident whom he considered the center of the occasion. Then Sir Clement saw that Miss Witherspoon was also watching the two. So she was in the know. Naturally. After a while Jocelyn suddenly straightened himself up and walked squarely up to Hazel. Sir Clement saw a quick blush spring to her cheek which, however, as quickly died away. Jocelyn whispered a few words to her. She listened with evident hesitation, then she nodded and the two strolled away.

Further and further they went, Sir Clement looking after them with a strange sinking at his heart, till they were lost to sight in the woods. And the next moment Sir Clement saw Miss Witherspoon's gaze fixed on him with a curiously questioning look. And he knew that she knew even more than he thought. He went up to her.

"A great success, Miss Witherspoon," he said.

"Yes, in some respects," she answered, as though irritated.

"Why do you qualify it?"

"I was thinking of something." And her glance strayed involuntarily towards the woods.

"Are those young people going to make it up?"

It did not occur to her to ask how he knew or what he knew, but she answered miserably:

"I presume so."

"It would be a splendid thing," he said pensively. "They would make each other very happy."

"I don't know." And then Tabitha burst out fiercely: "She's too good for him."

"She's too good for anybody," he said quietly.

"I wouldn't go so far as that, Sir Clement," she remarked vehemently. "Somebody will have to be good enough for her one day. She can't be allowed to go through the world all alone."

"That she can't," he agreed.

"She's not strong enough, like me."

"Yes, you're a strong woman, Miss Witherspoon."

"There must be compensations. Where there's no sweetness, there should at least be strength."

"Now, then, I won't have you running yourself down. There's a womanliness in you that's sweeter than myrrh and incense."

"Yes, *in* me. But in my days the young men never looked beneath the surface. They never married a girl because they thought she would make a good mother. I don't know if it's any different now."

He ached to hear the bitterness in her words. What comfort could he give to this lonely soul?

"You have your work," he said half at random.

"Yes, thank God. And to-day my work is play. So I must be off."

He felt annoyed with himself. He had had an opportunity of talking to her about Hazel, and he had let it turn off to a side-issue. And then again he felt glad. What profit would it have brought to him? Miss Witherspoon evidently did not care for the idea of Hazel and Jocelyn

making it up. But what odds were there in that? Hazel and Jocelyn would trouble themselves very little what view anybody took of their reconciliation. They were strolling through the woods, and by now, no doubt, Jocelyn had again his arm round her waist.

But a little while later he saw Hazel return, alone. And it was not the same Hazel who had gone. A change that was more than visible, that could be felt by him even at that distance, had come over her. She carried herself like a queen, her head erect, her eyes flashing flame. In each cheek burned a bright spot, almost hectically. He feared to go up to her, lest his presence should embarrass her. Her attitude was one of dazed helplessness and she looked round with searching vacancy, till her eyes met his. She sent him a wan but spontaneous smile. The burning spots died away, leaving her very pale. He approached her quickly.

"I haven't had a word with you to-day," he said.

"I know whose fault that is," she retorted with forced brightness.

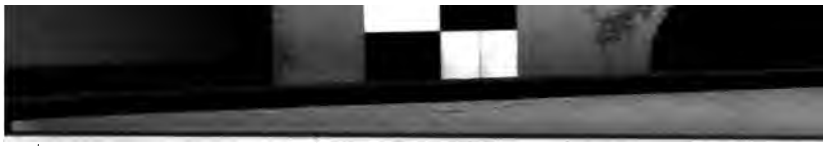
"Do you feel ill, Hazel?"

"I don't feel ill. I'm trying not to feel at all."

"Don't do that, Hazel. Don't grow hard. Remain human. Keep your emotions in a state of flux. Life has still many good things in store for you. If you let the softness go out of your nature you will not be able to enjoy them."

"Oh, yes, I shall have many things to enjoy," she said bitterly.

He tried to follow her inward vision and thought he could see her soul shrink with a gesture of horror. Was she actuated by something in which Jocelyn had a hand? Surely she exaggerated. She still felt very sore, it was not to be marveled at, and her nerves jumped at the slightest inconsiderate touch.



"There are two dangers one has chiefly to guard against in life, Hazel," he said, "rash conclusions and misunderstandings. Nothing makes more havoc in the heart."

"There are some things one cannot misunderstand," she replied.

Still harping on that imaginary wrong! As far as he could he would reassure her.

"Hazel, I am not going to ask you about anything I have no right to know," he said softly. "But remember, I have promised to be your friend. That promise surely needs no repetition."

"Oh, I know, I know," she cried in a transport of gratitude. He did not take it for anything more than that.

"If there is any service I can render you, don't hesitate to call on me."

"Thank you, Sir Clement. But there is nothing, nothing."

"I know you can't have a very good opinion of my attempts at playing Providence."

She held up a protesting hand.

"No, no, Sir Clement, that's against our agreement. We were not to refer to—anything, not even by innuendo."

"I should like to improve your opinion of me as a meddler."

"If you will use that ugly word," she flashed at him, "can you guarantee any better results?" And then, fearing that she had hurt him, for he hung his head, her hand went to her throat and she came very close to him. "Forgive me, friend. It isn't pleasant to have to choke things back. I would like to tell you everything. But—but there are some things one must lock up in oneself. Yes, some things may not be worth keeping, and yet one must keep them all the same."

And she turned away to hide the tears that had sprung to her eyes.

He felt moved beyond words. What were the things she must keep? What were the feelings that crowded and clogged her heart? What were the experiences, besides those he knew of, which she had to keep locked up? She wished to talk—she had no one to talk to. Of course there was Miss Witherspoon. But perhaps there was not that salt of comfort in the confidences one woman makes to another which she would derive from those made to a man instinct with the tang of a stronger personality. Yes, Miss Witherspoon was all very well. But Miss Witherspoon—always Miss Witherspoon, and yet again Miss Witherspoon! Oh, the deadly monotony of it.

He was thrown back on his own speculations. What indeed had passed between her and Jocelyn to have affected her so strongly? He saw that this time it was more than a rift, it was a breach. Irretrievable? He felt cold at the thought. God in heaven, that must never be. For if it were, it would open the door for the greatest ordeal of all, one that he shuddered to put into words. Hazel the Avenger! Would that vengeance go so far as to sap from him the last ounce of his endurance? Hazel free, free to hear his love, free to be won, and then, when he stood face to face with happiness, to be confronted with the grinning death-mask he knew for Will Dallas. Will's hand was in all this. It would never be stayed. It would work on cunningly, till they met in the Great Beyond and over a brotherly grip he could say to him: "Here I am, old pard—let's cry quits."

He felt her side-glance upon him as they strolled slowly on, and he pulled himself together. She had troubles enough of her own without being perplexed by his.

"Come and have an ice," he said suddenly.

"Thank you, I will," she said gratefully.

They went to the booth, and Miss Clavering fumed to see him pay the little schoolmistress the attention he had not bestowed on her. As she ate, Hazel glanced all round with a look in which it was easy to read fear. Finally Sir Clement looked at his watch.

"I'm afraid I can't stay to the end."

At that she edged up close to him and he thought he could feel a tremor pass through her body.

"Sir Clement," she said hurriedly, "I told you an untruth when I said your friendship could do nothing for me. I want to make my first claim on it. Don't go—stay with me. I should like you to stay."

He did not ask her why and stayed. But there was no necessity for it. Jocelyn did not come back.

CHAPTER V

MISS WITHERSPOON, SPINSTER

"CLEM, that London architect is here with the plans for the Public Baths. Come down and see him," said Ken.

"I leave it to you."

"You'll do no such thing. It's too important. I won't take the responsibility."

"Well, what have I got you for?" asked Sir Clement irritably.

"Not to take your money and keep you in mopes. You pay the piper and you should at least look at the tune he's going to play. Come and see the plans."

"Ken, for heaven's sake, leave me alone."

But instead of doing so, Ken sat down, slowly, deliberately.

"The fellow downstairs can wait," he said grimly. "I'll talk to you first. Clem, you know you can't go on like this. You're letting yourself sink deeper and deeper into the morass. Soon it'll be up to your neck and there'll be no chance of getting you out."

"I don't know that I want to get out."

"That's not for you to say. If your friends insist on saving you for themselves, you ought at least to lend them a helping hand. Now buck up, Clem. The devil takes the hindmost."

"And devil a bit I care whether he takes me or not," Sir Clement cried angrily. "Your fussing round me like this, Ken, is getting on my nerves. Why do you persist in treating me like an invalid?"

"Because you are one. Your mind's sick, Clem, and you know it."

"It's no more sick now than it's ever been since the karoo."

"That's not true, Clem. You're getting worse. And you've been a great deal worse since your London adventure. I don't want to pry into that. Pickle your secrets. But you've told me one of them, and I know the cause of your illness, though I'm blowed if I know the cure. I've suggested one cure, but you won't have it. Now what else is there to be done?"

"To go and see the architect's plans."

"Hang the plans and the architect. I don't care a rap whether you see them or not. But I've been wanting a peg on which to hang my homily and now I'm taking it."

"You're doing a lot of hanging, Ken." Sir Clement smiled feebly.

"Now, Clem, I really have a suggestion to make, but don't laugh at me."

"I promise I won't laugh at you, old fellow."

"How about falling in love?" said Ken suddenly.

"What's that?" said Sir Clement with a start.

"Plenty of nice girls round here. I only bar Josephine. That's the thing to take a chap out of himself, although I've never tried it myself. I don't know if it wouldn't be better if you were to get up a hopeless passion."

"Ken, what do you know?" Sir Clement cried hoarsely.

"What, do you mean to say you've gone and done it?" asked Ken, very much astonished at having hit the bull's-eye without taking aim. "So that's at the bottom of the trouble. But, confound it all, if you want the girl so badly, why not go for her?"

"I can't, Ken."

"What, married?"

Sir Clement shook his head.

"There are reasons why I can't ask her, Ken," he said dully.

"Funking it? Strange that a man who has looked the world in the eye as you have can't muster up the pluck to put a simple question to a girl. Then let me take a hand in it, Clem. I'll put it to her. Wooing by proxy, I call it. Not a new invention. Used to be very much in the fashion among royalties in medieval times," said Ken eagerly, getting worked up by his idea. "Now all I want is the name of the lady."

"Ken, you can take my body and soul and do with them what you like. I've let you know more than I should—you took me unawares—and I don't mind your treating it humorously. But keep doing it—that's your share. The serious part of it is mine."

"Well, not you and not me, and the poor girl will never know!" cried Ken, honestly perplexed. "Why's that?"

"If I know, it's enough."

Poor Ken went away, feeling he had tried to crack a hard nut and hurt his jaws badly. Mystery upon mystery! Who, in heaven's name, could the blessed girl be? Josephine was out of the question, Hazel had her Jocelyn, and he could not think of anybody else on whom Clement had wasted a look. Surely not the Flossie, whose connection with Clem Ken vaguely remembered. She was not the sort of creature to inspire a lifelong attachment, even in a quixotic chap like Clem. Well, probably some one else hidden in the dim past of whom he did not know. What was the use of conjectures?

That Clem was in a bad way, getting worse and worse, Ken saw very clearly. This love trouble, of course, was not the radical evil, but it was a complication, an aggravation. That monastery business was a poor solution. Clem

would never find peace however deeply he buried himself, for it would only bury his real trouble more deeply within him. Perhaps it would be kindness to wish his brains already shrouded in the swathes of insanity. The approaches to it must be terrible.

And things were indubitably and rapidly tending that way. Not for nothing had Clem taken to sleeping in his room since the night of Charley's last visit. It was not a good sign that a grown man should betake himself back to the habits of a child. For Clem had become afraid of sleeping in the dark. Greatly to Ken's discomfort a light had to be kept burning in the room all night.

And often Ken had stolen out of bed and, watching the sleeping Clem, had seen the twitchings of his face, the spasmodic movements of his limbs, heard the uneasy mutterings. What dreams were stampeding through the driven brain which, as Clem had complained, the hag was riding so hard? And often indeed had he felt tempted to take that unhappy head in his arms and cradle it against his strong breast, as a brother might do to a brother.

And was there really no help? Ken got furious with himself for that sense of crippled impotence. And then, all at once, he clapped his hand to his forehead. It was often so—the dire extremity was its own inspiration. An idea had come to him, wild, impossible, preposterous. And yet, perhaps not so wild and preposterous after all. There was the hundredth chance.

He had certain data to go upon, certain suspicions. He had never been quite free from them since his return from Africa. They made a theory, daring in its very improbability. It was a thing he really ought to discuss with Clem. But he must be wary about that. To breathe the merest whisper of it to Clem, might raise sanguine hopes, and if these were dashed, it would, as likely as not, precipitate

the catastrophe. But to himself he might allow the faintest allusion, the ghost of a hint: why had Charley Dallas led them on the wrong track in the matter of his brother's resting-place?

Sir Clement too was thinking. He did not think often now, but simply ached in a vague, irrelevant way. Dear old Ken, he had treated him with scant courtesy. He had told him so much—why had he not told him everything? But there was a strange reluctance in Sir Clement to make him this final confidence of all. The notion of Hazel, the Avenger, had taken too deep a root in his mind. Ken, the infidel, would have jeered at it. And that would have been sacrilege.

For to Sir Clement the conception had become invested with the sanctity of a Credo, something not to be profaned by gratuitous utterance. It would lose its force by the confession. Such peace as he would ever find could only be brought about by inward anguish. His only possible self-reconcilement lay in his suffering. Who could help him in that? As long as he could bear up under it, he would. And then he would leave the issue to God.

He was shaken out of himself by the arrival of a visitor. None other than Miss Witherspoon. But it was not the usual Miss Witherspoon. He hardly recognized her in this person, flurried, wrought to high tension, her face set in a mask of fear.

"Sit down and catch your breath," he said, forcing her into a chair by both shoulders.

She sank into it gratefully.

"And now drink this," and he brought to her a glass of claret and soda, which she accepted with equal gratitude.

"And now let's have the trouble."

"It's about Hazel," she burst out.

"Yes, what about Hazel?"

"She's going to leave."

"Leave what?"

"The school—Woodlands."

His head reeled, but he took a grip on himself. Hazel going away from him! That was not the same thing as his going away from her, for he knew he would find her on his return. But for Hazel to go away, perhaps where he could not follow, to put a great distance between him and her, that was an emergency he had not contemplated. And yet, would it perhaps not be for the best?

"This is very sudden, Miss Witherspoon. What is making her do it? There must be a strong reason, or, I should rather say, a whole series of contributory causes."

"They are all summed up in one name: Jocelyn."

"I could see that they did not patch it up yesterday."

"Patch it up? It was yesterday that the mischief came to a head."

"Quite so. Perhaps you had better start at the beginning."

"Yes, I must go back some little way. There had been constant friction between them for some time. Hazel was always urging him to be up and doing—something, anything. His loafing ways filled her with alarm. She was loath to marry a man who could not support her by the work of his hands or head."

"Only what was to be expected of her."

"It was complicated by your refusal to help him in that Canada scheme."

"Indeed? This is the first I hear of any Canada scheme."

"That was what I suspected. So latterly did Hazel. She had come to accept his statements with a grain of salt. Then he fobbed her off with the promise he said you had made to him to find him a job in London."

"How could I promise him that? I don't know anybody. And what's more, I don't know his capacities, if any."

"I guessed that too. She almost sent him away, but he would not go. There is no doubt that he is very much in love with her, only that he is more in love with himself. The climax came the day before he went away with you. She told him, fully and finally, what she expected of him. And since then their relations have been strained, if not broken."

"Yes, but there's nothing in all that to make her go away."

"No, it wasn't that."

Miss Witherspoon had become fidgety and ill at ease as she proceeded. She had evidently come to a point in her story which she found difficult to manipulate. Then, as though acting on an inspiration, she opened her satchel, drew out a letter and handed it to Sir Clement.

"Perhaps you had better read this. She didn't. She took it from the postman, glanced at the writing on the envelope, tore it up and flung it into the grate. Fortunately, it being summer-time, there was no fire. Else we should perhaps have never got at the heart of the complication. I picked up the pieces—very immoral of me—and carefully patched them together."

Sir Clement read and reread it. Then he looked up.

"Quite a decent letter. An apology, a promise not to repeat the offense. Now what was the offense?"

"For a long time she refused to say. Simply insisted on going away. I threatened her that if she did, I would throw up my post and go too. I pointed out to her that at my time of life I should probably find it difficult to get another. Even that did not work. She said I could do what I liked—she was going. And then I took the bull by



the horns and told her what I suspected had occurred. She did not deny it."

"Please don't feed me with riddles, Miss Witherspoon. What was it you suspected and she did not deny?"

Miss Witherspoon squirmed.

"Must I really tell you, Sir Clement?" she asked imploringly. "You see I'm—I'm an unmarried woman."

"Then you'll have to become married, if I have to marry you myself."

She saw the gravity under his grim jest and, looking him straight between the eyes, she told him all. He only nodded occasionally, but more as though in response to some observations of his own. They did not seem pleasant observations. She grew frightened as she saw the storm she was raising within him. By the time she had finished his face had become a thundercloud.

"Thank you, Miss Witherspoon," he said at last.

She rose as if in haste to get away.

"I wish you had something better to thank me for, Sir Clement."

"Is not doing your duty good enough? I shall know how to handle this matter."

"And you won't give me away?" she asked anxiously.

He reassured her completely.

"And—and you won't do anything rash?"

"Do I look as if I would do that?"

"No, you look icy. I would much sooner you swore and carried on."

"I may have my own way of doing that," he smiled as he saw her to the door.

CHAPTER VI

JOCELYN'S GREAT OCCASION

AND, indeed, his icy reserve boded greater ill to somebody than the most formidable outbreak would have done. He felt this more keenly than he had thought it possible for him to feel anything. He remembered his words and could grasp the ironic ring they must have borne to her. Poor little girl! He had talked to her about enjoying the sweets of life. Her joys seemed to be brambles that grew in her path at every step. Well, this bramble he would uproot with a merciless hand.

He left word with the servants that as soon as Mr. Jocelyn returned he wished to see him. And some time later Jocelyn came in, the same blithe, debonair Jocelyn he knew.

"Hullo, what's up, Clem?" he asked, stopping short. "You look like a schoolmaster with a big stick."

"Yes, and nothing would please me more than to lay you across my knee and give you the biggest spanking a schoolboy ever had."

"Hold hard, Clem," said Jocelyn, flushing and defiant, "two can play at that game."

"Sit down."

And Jocelyn sat. Clem looked as if he could easily carry out his threat.

"What have you been doing to Miss Middleton?"

Jocelyn whistled.

"I thought it was that." His straight white teeth showed in a sneer. "There's a dignified thing for Sir Galahad to

do. Spying, eavesdropping. I know she hasn't come blabbing to you."

"Of course she hasn't. It's not a thing she would care to make public. How I came to know isn't your concern."

"Then it was old Tabbycat."

"Leave other names out of the question. As a matter of fact, you gave the thing away yourself."

"What, have I been talking in my sleep?"

"To the point, Jocelyn," Sir Clement said sternly. "I want to know what you meant by asking Miss Middleton to spend a week-end in town with you."

"What I meant?" asked Jocelyn truculently. "To give her a good time, of course. Do you think it's fun to teach those bumpkin brats the multiplication table day in day out? I can't help it if you put your own crooked construction on it."

"Can a gentleman put any other construction on the words you used? You told her that before your prospects materialized you would both be old and gray. Heaven never meant your youth to be wasted like that. Pluck the roses while you may—nobody would be any the wiser. You'd go mad if she didn't consent. Is it possible to misconstrue such phrases?"

"Yes, they do sound rather silly now," said Jocelyn unconcerned.

"Jocelyn, what would your father have said if he knew of it? What would he have said of a son of his making such questionable proposals to the daughter of a man who, like him, had the honor of wearing the King's uniform?"

And involuntarily Sir Clement thought of the remark addressed to Mr. Cripps by the chairman of the hangman's committee.

"How would he, I ask you, have liked his son to utter

words which set a defenseless girl crying with pain and shame? I saw those tears myself."

"That's right, rub it in," said Jocelyn airily. He saw that the great moment was at hand.

"I'm not talking to you as the stern moralist, Jocelyn. I'm only taking a practical view of the matter. I've shut my eyes to a good many things in you, but I must draw the line at a big scandal."

"Hm, scandal, is that what you're afraid of?" asked Jocelyn with a lurking air.

"Our name has always stood for what's right and honorable, though you sometimes seem to forget it." Jocelyn gave a jeering laugh, but Sir Clement ignored it. "You forget everything, just because a girl looks devilishly pretty, which was the reason you gave in your letter to explain and excuse your blackguardliness. You know you were telling her lies when you said to her the outlook was gloomy and hopeless, and that there was no way of your being anything to each other except by the cowardly way you suggested. You know you've been cramming her with lies all this time —I don't want to go into that. But I want to make sure that you won't forget your manners again. Jocelyn, a straight question: do you love Hazel?"

"What business is that of yours? However, supposing?"

"And does she love you?"

"I flatter myself she does."

Sir Clement set his lips tight. It was hard for him, unutterably hard, to say what he was going to say. He could have shed tears for pain. But the crowning sacrifice must be made. It was all in the scheme of his atonement.

"Then you will make her the only reparation for your insult that's due to her," he said harshly.

"What's that, pray?"

"You'll marry her."

Jocelyn looked at him in surprise. Then he broke into a laugh.

"What on? The paltry few hundred a year you dole out to me?"

"You know I don't mean that. I'm prepared to make ample provision for you. But there's a condition."

"Of course. There are conditions hanging on to everything you say."

"This is not a hard one. Only that you marry her at once. We'll go up to London, the three of us, get Mason to draw up the settlements, and you can be made man and wife from Tudor Square in two or three days."

"Some people are sentenced to be hanged, some to be married," Jocelyn laughed flippantly. But the ambushing air with which he had toised Sir Clement from the beginning did not relax. He was still playing with his cache. "Will you kindly inform me, Clement, why this indecent haste?"

"To protect Miss Middleton," was the uncompromising reply. "I can't watch your every step. I won't let her run the risk of going through another scene like yesterday's—when I'm not eavesdropping. You've made the girl care for you. I take it you care for her yourself. There's no reason why you shouldn't hit it off very well."

"None whatever. Well, will you go and ask her?"

"Ask her what?"

"Whether she'll marry me."

"Doesn't that come within your part of the business?"

"I suppose it does. But I'm not taking it on. I'm not going near her after the way she told me off yesterday."

"Joss, that's the first sign of decency I've observed in you."

"Thanks awfully. So there wouldn't have been another scene. But if it's to come off at all, you'll have to see about it yourself."

"Very well, I will, Joss. That's all for the present."

"I don't think so."

Sir Clement faced him in surprise. There was a startling change in Jocelyn's tone and manner. He looked different, had grown taller. There was about him an air of puffed importance, of crowing masterfulness. Sir Clement frowned. He had put up with Jocelyn's pert levity during the interview, but he would not stand any more of his insolence.

"What is it, Joss?"

"My turn, Sir Clement, that's all."

"Are you going to let me have a wigging now?"

"I don't know what name you'll give it. Did Ken bring any news from Africa?"

"There's always something new out of Africa, as the old Romans used to say. How did you know that Ken had been to Africa?" asked Sir Clement, on whom Jocelyn's unexpected question had produced no visible effect.

"No conjure about it. He forgot to take the label off one of his trunks. I suppose he went out to clean up any unconsidered trifles in the way of traces you may have left there."

By this time Sir Clement's face had become granite.

"What traces, Joss?" he asked quietly.

"No good beating about the bush, Clem. I know everything. I've seen Charley Dallas."

"You're welcome to him."

"Yes, but the information can't be very welcome to you. He gave me all the story of your killing his brother out there. I know you're in the beggar's hands, but all the same it was very imprudent of you to pay him by check."

"Granted. Well, what of it?"

"What of it?" echoed Jocelyn blankly. "Hang it, Clem, don't you realize your position?"

"Oh, quite. But I'm just wondering what it all has to do with you. Are you concerned about me? Don't be afraid. Charley won't blab as long as I pay."

Jocelyn was getting annoyed. A little bravado was all very well, but this counterfeit sangfroid could be carried too far. Better let Clement know at once that he meant business.

"Sir Clement, you can bribe Charley Dallas, but you can't bribe me," he said loftily. "You know you are occupying a position to which you have no right. You know where you really ought to be."

"Yes, I know. Well, Joss, will you come to terms with me?"

"Terms?" said Jocelyn, hastily clambering down from his altitude and promptly falling into the trap. "Well, as I'm not too anxious to stir up the family scandal you spoke of before, I am ready to consider terms. But they'll be stiff 'uns, Clem!" He rubbed his hands exultantly. "Now you'll see how silly you look, trying to carry things over me with a high hand, ordering me to marry this girl or that, whether I want to or not. We'll do some of the ordering for a change, my friend."

"You'll still marry Hazel. That is one of my terms."

"Your terms? You're crazy. It's I that's making terms with you, not you with me. If you say much more about it I'll send the girl to limbo altogether. You'll have to go halves with me, Clement."

"What, in Hazel?"

Jocelyn was furious and just a little dashed. Things were not at all going according to plan. The great occasion seemed fizzling out. Clem was not on his knees, whin-

ing for mercy. He must put some ginger into the business. No more of these milk-and-watery methods.

"You'll laugh the wrong side of your mouth in a minute," he cried hotly. "If you force me to it, is there any reason why I should not put the law on to you?"

"None that I can see, dear Joss."

"Have I anything to lose by it?"

"I'll tell you about that presently."

Jocelyn became very subdued. The iron nerve his cousin showed was based on something more than the despairing temerity of a lost cause.

"You'll sing a different tune in the dock." He made another attempt at bluster.

"If I stand in the dock, how will that benefit you?"

By this time Jocelyn was reduced to a dismayed silence.

"My poor Joss, I'm exceedingly sorry for you," Sir Clement went on with commiserating indulgence. "You're in the unfortunate position of the man who in the dark grabbed hold of a bad-tempered dog by the wrong end and the dog protested. Or rather, thinking you've got me in a cleft stick, have only got your own fingers jammed. The trouble is that you reason obliquely. Let me put it to you as concisely as I can. Supposing you have me put in prison, I'll have to go, having no alternative. And then? I don't know where I shall have to stand my trial, here or back there. But even if I am extradited, don't forget, dear Jocelyn, that I shall take my title and status along with me. The law's a snob, and there is every chance that the charge will be toned down to one of manslaughter. I shall get twenty years, and after seven or eight I shall be released. Are you getting me, Joss?"

Whether he did or did not, Jocelyn did not say. He just sat there, his lower jaw dropping foolishly.

"Now I'll come to the point as it affects you, dear boy.

They can take my liberty from me, but they can't touch my property. I shall still be Sir Clement Barradine, even in a broad-arrow suit, and owner of Woodlands. During my incarceration the estate will be placed in chancery and administered by trustees, who will act under the dispositions I shall make before I go to prison. You will probably not figure in those dispositions. Your thousand a year is not settled on you as an annuity. Now do you understand, Jocelyn?"

"You're a devil, that's what you are!" cried Jocelyn savagely.

"No need to call me hard names because I talk sense."

"Sense? You must have given a darned lot of thinking to it to work it out so cut and dried."

"Lord, if you only knew how much thought I've given to it all!" said Sir Clement bitterly. "You'll never do as much thinking in a hundred years as I've done this last twelvemonth. But don't be afraid, boy"—his tone took on a strange kindliness—"I'm not going to do you out of your own. I only want to save you from making a fool of yourself and get you to trust me. Let me see you and Hazel settled and the rest will follow naturally."

"To blazes with your fine words," said Jocelyn sullenly. "You've put me nicely in baulk and you can afford to play the magnanimous."

"I don't want to play anything, Joss," said Sir Clement, a pained look crossing his haggard face. "Life's too serious for me to handle it as a box of toy-bricks. I hope yours will be happier, Joss. I hope it will contain no untoward mistakes. I made one mistake and I am paying for it at compound interest. I don't know whether I am doing Hazel a favor by insisting on your marrying her. But I have full trust in her. A woman like that can work miracles. She'll even be able to make you into the man she

wants you to be—pardon me, Joss, for saying that, but it wouldn't be a bad thing for you either. And then I'll be off."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jocelyn suspiciously.

"Step out of your way, Joss."

"You're the deuce at puzzling a fellow. Step out of my way—be off? Where to, Clem?"

"I don't quite know yet. And there's no need for you to worry. I shall just—disappear, as suddenly as I came. You've done me a service, Joss. The fact of your having got hold of my secret is to me a clear call from heaven that it is time for me to go. I was waiting for something like that. Yes, I'm in the wrong place. I'd have been better off as a crossing-sweeper. There won't be any need for you to enter a motion to presume my death. You shall have incontestable proof of it, and no trouble to you either."

"But, gracious, Clem, I don't want you to die!" cried Jocelyn, awed by the other's solemnity of tone.

"It does not necessarily follow that I shall, Joss. The main thing is to get the evidence into your hands. I'll know how to do that. I might take Charley Dallas along with me and, for a consideration, he'll swear an affidavit that, say, he saw me blown to smithereens."

"Yes, and then I'll have him on to me for blackmail instead of you."

"I forgot that," smiled Sir Clement. "You're shrewder than I took you to be. It gives me hope that you will develop into a sensible man. Well, if not Charley, then it'll be somebody else, who won't know of you. There are plenty of Dallases in the world. I'll see that I won't make a mess of it. Well, what do you say to it, Jocelyn?"

"I'm agreeable, if you insist on being a dozen Don Quixotes rolled into one," said Jocelyn with what appeared

a reluctant shrug. "After all, you did do me out of the succession by the merest fluke, didn't you? You might easily have been dead."

"Oh, very easily. It wasn't for lack of chances. Only I don't want you to run away with the idea that I am doing this altogether for the sake of your beautiful eyes. It'll be as much a favor to me as to you."

"I don't understand it," said Jocelyn, shaking his head.

"Nor ever will. Well, am I to ask Hazel?"

"Ask her, and be damned to you!" cried Jocelyn as he flung out with a rush.

CHAPTER VII

WOOING BY PROXY

SIR CLEMENT thrust his hands into his pockets as if they were crammed with satisfaction and he could help himself *ad lib.* And, indeed, he felt better than he had felt for a long time. At last something had varied the dreary monotony of the days, and he had been compelled to some decision.

And he knew it would be for his good. He had always thought it a sheer sarcasm of fate that at the moment when he ought to have been smitten with all the ills of the flesh, with physical hardship and discomfort, he had been granted such benefits. Ease and well-being were his, and all the blessings for which men worthier than he strove in vain.

And now he had resolved to resign his worldly possessions, and beyond that, he had jettisoned what was worth more than the sum-total of them. He had never possessed Hazel, would never possess her, but it had been sweet and precious to him to know, at least during these last few hours, that she belonged to no other. And here, of his own accord, he was yielding her up. His bitterest enemy could not ask for more. His chest broadened, and his breath seemed to come with more freedom than it had known for many a long day.

And now for the task he had undertaken. He could not ward off an impression that it had something of humor about it. Only an hour ago Ken had offered to go on this very errand for him, and now he was going himself. It was he who was the wooer by proxy.

Miss Witherspoon let him in with an admonishing look to which he replied with a nod of comprehension. Somehow he felt, as he looked at Hazel, that his task would not be as easy as he had thought. Her mouth was drawn as if she had a wry taste in it. Further thought, no doubt, had made the enormity of Jocelyn's offense stand out more glaringly and had made her give expression to her revolt against her surroundings, as proclaimed by her to Miss Witherspoon. What a shame to have made of her an Ahasuerus, finding no rest for the sole of her little foot. And what glad tidings that the jangling discord of yesterday was going to end in the music of marriage bells!

They did not greet each other formally. All ceremony seemed to have dropped from them since that memorable visit to London. She did not even, beyond a slight nod, interrupt herself in her occupation as he entered. He too, apparently, found no cause for comment as he watched her for a moment or two packing away her belongings in the two open portmanteaus.

"So you're taking a holiday after all," he said at last.

"A long holiday, as far as Woodlands is concerned," she replied, speaking rather stiffly.

"What, you don't mean you're leaving us?" he asked, simulating surprise.

"I'm afraid I am, Sir Clement."

"But why? I thought you were happy here, that you liked us."

"I don't dislike Woodlands," she said quietly, "only I feel I'm beginning to vegetate, getting tired and stale. I must have a change, or my vocation will suffer."

"If you must have a change, why not change the vocation itself?"

"For what?" she asked in surprise.

"For the one most in vogue among your sex—marriage."

The flush that lit up her face made it look for the moment as if it were flying a flag of victory.

"Marriage—to whom?" she inquired, almost in a whisper.

"To my cousin Jocelyn. Does it surprise you?"

"It does," she said voicelessly.

She had become very pale and, turning her back on him, sat down as though overcome by a sudden weakness.

"I am here, Hazel," he resumed, in a set voice like one repeating a lesson, "as Jocelyn's Envoy Extraordinary and Ambassador Plenipotentiary. He offers you his hand and heart. He does not want to do so in person—he said something about having in some mysterious way offended you. What answer am I to take him?"

She sat twining and untwining her fingers, and then he thought he saw a shudder pass through her—the same shudder he had noted yesterday.

"I—I don't know," she said, a little wildly. "I fear him."

"I thought you loved him."

"Love, if it is love, and fear can go together," she answered.

"I don't understand that. I always thought that where there was love there could be no fear."

She leaped up suddenly and faced him with flaming eyes.

"That is because you don't know what love is!" she cried. "When it was offered you, you spurned it, trampled it under foot. What right have you to speak of it?"

"None, none whatever," he replied pensively, "except to point out that this is against our contract. Unless, of course, you have reserved to yourself the right of breaking it whenever there was a chance of flinging a reproach at me. That is quite correct. In fact, I would rather have it so."

It was the first cruel thing he had ever said to her and he was astounded at the effect. The next instant she had

seized his hands and was clasping them in a frenzy of penitence. And the tears coursed down her cheeks unrestrained.

"Oh, my friend, my friend, forgive me for saying such a horribly unjust thing to you, to you of all people. Now you can see what I am, how unworthy of your regard, your friendship."

"I am the best judge of that, little one," he said, stroking her hair. "You see, I have to safeguard your future. I may not always be here. The growing vine must be bound to a prop, so that it may struggle joyously upwards to the sun. Tabitha thinks so too."

"Tabitha always loved me more than herself."

"Tabitha is not the only one."

Again, as once before, the temptation had come, but the words only formed themselves in his brain and remained unspoken. There was more urgent business to hand than thus idly to dangle his aching heart before her eyes. For now he knew it would give her pain as well.

"Tell me why you are afraid of Jocelyn," he asked her.

"Because he is as unstable as water, as wayward as the wind. He will not put his mind to anything—it flutters here and there irresponsibly. It will flutter away from me."

"That will be remedied. Partly by me, and the rest will be for you. I propose to have the estates divided into two equal shares. Fortunately they are not entailed. That will give him the stability, the responsibility he needs. He won't be able to remain idle. He will have to give the land close attention to prevent it from depreciating. He will have to keep his nose to the grindstone, because once the rot sets in it is difficult to stop it. You will help him. Community of interests will make a bond he will never think of breaking."

"Oh, how noble you are, how good!"

"Good to myself, Hazel. In knowing you happy, I shall be happy myself. I have much to make good to you."

She was about to turn on him with a rebuke, when she stayed herself. Something had come back to her, something which in the rush of his words she had oversighted and which now filled her with a nameless apprehension.

"What did you mean before by saying that you may not always be here?" she asked.

"Well, we none of us shall, shall we, Hazel?" He smiled dimly.

"No, no, you meant something more," she urged. "You also talked of knowing me happy, not of seeing me happy."

"Did I? Oh, just an awkwardness of speech."

But she saw the evasive look in his eyes and held him to the point, almost with the physical hold she exercised on his arm.

"Sir Clement, I don't believe you. There's more behind it than you want me to know. Oh, please, please tell me!" came from her tremblingly. He cursed himself for his clumsiness and, seeing him hesitate, she went on quickly. "No, no, don't go searching for palliatives. Tell me the truth—oh, do!"

"Yes, Hazel, I'm going away," he said with direct simplicity. "You know that by nature and acquired habits I am a vagrant."

"But you've gone away before and have come back. You'll come back this time too, won't you?"

"I don't think I shall, Hazel."

"What, and shall I never see you again?" she whispered, her tears flowing afresh.

"If you wish me well, pray that you never shall. There are certain reasons to prevent me from coming back, cer-

tain practical reasons, and also one other, which is not so practical and therefore can be ignored."

"Then you are really going away for your own happiness?" she asked wretchedly.

"Yes, such as I shall ever find."

"Oh, then if it is ever, ever so little, I shall not stop you," she cried, her face glorified by a beautiful courage of resignation. "And that, although you will never know what your loss means to me. Do you really want me to marry Jocelyn?"

"Yes, Hazel, I wish it with all my heart and soul."

"Very well," she said, clasping her hands humbly, as though in obedience to a solemn command.

"You will buy your trousseau in London," he went on more briskly. "You will do me the honor of accepting it from me as a wedding present."

"Oh, gladly, gladly," she said readily. "What you will buy me will be more precious to me for being your gift, as being mementoes of you, perhaps the only ones I shall ever have—except my memories."

"Yes, Hazel, I should like you to remember me, to think kindly of me. It will be a comfort to me in my exile."

"And must it be—are you sure it must be exile?" she exclaimed in one last desperate attempt.

"It must be, Hazel."

He was anxious to get away. The tension had become unbearable to him.

"I'll send over a note later and let you know definitely about the arrangements. Meanwhile get ready at once. We are going up to town to-morrow."

She did not know whether he had left the room or not till all at once a great emptiness enveloped her and she looked round. For a moment she stood with arms out-

flung, then she ran up to Tabitha and threw herself sobbing on the couch.

"Control yourself, child," cried Tabitha, greatly alarmed. "What in the world has happened?"

"Oh, it has all turned out so different, so different!"

"What has turned out different?"

"When he came I felt all at once that I couldn't go away. I wanted to tell him everything and ask him to send Jocelyn away instead."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"Because he said he had come to tell me that Jocelyn wanted me to marry him."

"That's his doing," said Tabitha, almost to herself, having got over that stunned feeling of hers. "And I didn't see that that was the best way out of it, failing the only better one. Oh, how wise he is!"

"Yes, Tab, wise in all things and foolish only in one," sobbed Hazel.

"I don't believe it, Hazel, dear. If he is foolish in that, he knows he is and has a reason for it."

"He almost told me so."

"Well, then, I hope you didn't make it hard for him to remain firm in his unwisdom."

"Hard? It is he who is hard. He is stone, Tabitha."

"Not willingly, Hazel, but petrified by some stern necessity. We must let it go at that. We shall never know."

"I shall make the best of it," said Hazel, bravely, sitting up and wiping away her tears. Then she went up to Tabitha and lovingly twined her arms round her neck. "So we shall have to part after all, Tab, dear."

"I knew that we should, sooner or later. Though when I spoke of it jestingly the other day I didn't dream it would be so soon."

"Oh, Tab, can I ever tell you what you have been to me?"

"Not more than you've been to me," said Tabitha, almost harshly. "So that makes us quits. We don't owe each other anything."

"Tab," cried Hazel, "does that mean you're going to thrust me out of your life?"

"No, it isn't you who will have to complain about that."

"What, you think the change will be in me?" Hazel reproached her.

"You will have new calls, new interests," Tabitha said stonily.

"And neglect you? Never, never!" Hazel repeated with fierce emphasis. "I shall always love you like a—like a . . ."

"Oh, say it, Hazel!" Tabitha implored her. "Say like a mother. I'm proud of my gray hairs. What wouldn't I have given if God had granted me a daughter like you?"

"But you have me, Tab, dear. You will always have me. Nothing shall ever come between us. The place you have in my heart nobody else will ever fill."

"Do you promise me that, Hazel, do you promise?"

"Foolish one, does it need a promise? There, I will write it on your lips."

So they sat till the stars came out. Hazel was almost ready for her journey, only instead of more packing she had to do some unpacking. One portmanteau was enough, for there were the shops of London to be plundered. She felt a fierce joy in knowing that she need not spare his purse. Yes, she meant to pile up those mementoes of his. Then, for a time at least, she would live in a world of his making. But she knew that no world would be complete for her from which he was absent.

Rather late that evening a servant brought the note from him, asking her to be ready to catch the nine o'clock in

the morning. She looked at the message for a long time and then pressed it to her lips.

How strangely it had all turned out. How she had hated him, shrunk from him. By what imperceptible degrees he had insinuated himself into her heart. The change had first taken root when she saw him in all his manliness and strength on the platform at that meeting. The visit to London had clinched it. How great he had shown in his dealings with Sallie. What nobility of purpose had there been in his measures to render the two sisters safe for each other. He would not bring them together till he was sure that they could be sisters indeed.

Oh, yes, what wisdom was his, what a calm deep grasp of circumstances, what an almost ruthless clarity of vision! And in only one thing had he been blind, or, perhaps, too far-sighted.

One great chance she had let slip. Was there really something in the death-bed babblings of Sallie? Probably not. Poor little Sallie, poor untutored child, how could she ever have been equal to reading the hidden runes of that mysterious heart of his? But she might have taxed him with it on that homeward journey. And now she would never know. Too late—too late! The words echoed in her like a dirge.

And now for Jocelyn. It might have been a genuine desire on his part to make her amends. It might be, as Tabitha had suggested, that his hand had been forced by Sir Clement. It did not matter which it was. Clement did not know, he had given no hint of knowing, the sacrifice it meant to her. He had done it to serve his own purpose, and that purpose must be honored whatever the cost. She would do her duty to Jocelyn. She would be a good wife to him. She would not allow him to let her be anything else. She would rouse his energies, wake his ambi-

tions. She would make him worthy of the place in the world which Clement was about to vacate. The void he had left she would fill by turning Jocelyn into a Clement. So the two would be the same, and he would be with her still.

And so, too, she would keep worthy of her lost love. She looked down at the twinkling lights in the village, that went out one by one, like the closing of tired eyes. They reminded her of the task that was awaiting her. There was the joy of life to be put into those tired eyes. She would carry on the work he had so nobly begun. She would set up a monument to him. It would likewise be a monument to her buried happiness. The two things would be fit and mutual company. There would be no contradiction. The one would complement and dignify the other.

A drunken man passed by, bawling raucously. She shivered as she thought of the brute returning home to his heavy-eyed wife and sleeping children. And suddenly the bawling stopped. Some one talking to the man. And low-pitched though it was, she recognized the voice, and thrilled. Was he passing there casually, or had he, after writing his note, come back to watch under her window? Perhaps it was that benignant gaze of his which had poured such calm, such balm into her soul. And she thanked him for the lesson. She would train Jocelyn to do such deeds of kindness. She would teach him to be as an angel of peace to those humble cottages. And if he did not respond, she would take that office on herself.

The voices trailed away in the distance and she rose to go up to bed. As she passed Tabitha's room, she saw that there was still a light in it. She entered softly and saw Tabitha sitting at the table, her head propped on her hands.

"I was waiting for you, Hazel," she said without looking up.

"You're not feeling sad, dear, are you? You know that's foolish. We've had it out, haven't we?"

"I want to say good-by to you now, Hazel. Then you can go away without seeing me again in the morning. I may not feel equal to it to-morrow."

"But it's not going to be good-by, Tabitha!"

"Hazel, I know better. I feel sure that we part now never to meet again, unless it's by stealth, and we're both too proud for that. I've been thinking it over, sitting here. I've argued it all out with myself. Your lot is cast in with Jocelyn for better or worse, and I don't want you to quarrel with him about me. He will refuse to let you remain friends with me. He will ask you to cut yourself adrift from all your old associations. He will forbid you to come near me. He has always disliked me."

Hazel pressed her lips together as if in pain. A dark foreboding stole over her that Tabitha had spoken the truth. Some vague misgiving of the sort had already lightly brushed her mind, but she had refused to let it settle. She saw that there were many things which would have to be harmonized between her and her lord, many discords to be brought into tune. And in the clash of wills that was to ensue, whose would prevail?

"But it won't be good-by, Tabitha," she said, drawing herself up tautly, obstinately.

"No, Hazel, it won't be good-by. Good-by, Hazel."

The stars, through the drawn blind, could not see that farewell. But the Recording Angel saw it and sat, pen to lip, pondering whether there was no way of altering the decree he was about to set down.

CHAPTER VIII

TUDOR SQUARE

SIR CLEMENT called with the car in good time next morning. Hazel went away, feeling very sad, for Tabitha had been true to her pronunciamento of the previous night and, in spite of Hazel's frantic appeals, had remained adamant and would not open. So Hazel had to content herself with leaving a note into which she put all her heart and soul.

Jocelyn had not come in the car—he was going to meet them at the station. Sir Clement had rather quailed at the embarrassment of the meeting, but he could have spared himself his uneasiness, for there was no embarrassment. As soon as Jocelyn came sauntering on to the platform, with rather a hangdog air about him, Hazel quickly walked up to him and held up her lips. It was a girlish, womanly gesture and had in it a simple dignity that was as touching as it was charming. Jocelyn kissed her sheepishly. Yes, she always did the right thing, Sir Clement commented to himself.

The conversation in the train, all reference to the actual object of the journey being eschewed, was tolerably free from constraint. Jocelyn, as a matter of fact, was most of the time busy with two or three sporting papers.

London was looking its best under a glorious summer sky. Hazel felt her blood course quickly at the manifestation of its greatness and might. She had not been to town for any stay since she was a child, and the last time she had been here she had only seen Paradise Lane.

She was near to them again, so near and yet so far. She would go to them at her earliest opportunity. Sir Clement would no doubt take her, or the duty would by then—she recollected with a start—have devolved on Jocelyn. But she resolved it should be Sir Clement. It would be the last favor she would ask of him. She would feel more at home there in his company than in Jocelyn's who knew nothing, who understood nothing.

And then she remembered that to Clement too she would have to bid good-by. Something he had said in the train led her to surmise that his going would be immediate. What more fitting spot could there be for their valedictory than the sacred precincts of death?

For then too there would be another burial. And the thing to be buried this time would be the most precious part of herself. How life ran in opposites! Last time she had been here for a funeral. Now she was here for a wedding, her own wedding at that. It was almost inconceivable. Developments had followed each other so quickly —each moment she thought she would find herself waking from a dream.

But as she drove through the great winding streets, a strange fancy suddenly befell her. No, this was not a city of dreams, but of live realities. It seemed too vast, too intricate that a human hand should be able to spin through it a straight thread of destiny. It might so easily be raveled into an inextricable tangle. It would not need much to make one deviate from a proposed purpose. And she asked herself: would the purpose for which she had come work out as planned? The mighty womb of the great city could well bring forth abortive shapes, prodigies, the nature of which none could foresee. It might pit its limitless power against the petty finite endeavor of man, and then there could be no doubt who would be the victor.

And Hazel shrank into herself, feeling that she was the puny plaything of great unseen forces clashing round her in battle. And a dim presentiment told her that when the conflict was over, she would either be a bruised and battered thing, or she would have attained to the glory of a glad unending peace. And she clasped her hands as though in propitiatory prayer to gods that were strange to her.

Jocelyn left them at the station. He was going to pay some calls. Rooms had been engaged for him at the Savoy, and it was tacitly understood that they would see little of him till they met at the Registrar's. His presence was not even necessary at the lawyer's. The drawing up of the settlements was a mere formality, a farce, for Jocelyn knew that in no long time he would come into it all. The compact had been finally clinched the night before, and Jocelyn had indulged in some hypocritical objections which Sir Clement had promptly and sternly knocked on the head. No one knew of the intended marriage, except Tabitha. Not even Ken had been told, and Sir Clement thought with some compunction of his secrecy to that loyal friend. His heart was heavier still as he reflected on what more he would have to tell Ken.

Due and fitting preparations had been made for him and Hazel at Tudor Square. Mrs. Pink, the housekeeper, and the two maid-servants would provide sufficient in the way of chaperonage. In fact, the notion of a possible breach of the proprieties had never entered Sir Clement's or Hazel's heads. They would have been surprised had they known how unexpectedly the point would crop up. But to Sir Clement it was quite natural that Hazel should remain under his tutelage till she went to her legal guardian.

The commodious and elegant flat was a joy to Hazel. She went from room to room with almost childish delight. Her soul, hungry for beautiful things she had known and

never forgotten, reveled in the sight, the touch. Sir Clement had followed her, had seen and heard her delight, and was debating with himself whether he should put the coping-stone on her pleasure.

And at last he could contain himself no longer.

"I'm glad you like the place, Hazel. It looks as if you would be happy here."

"I'm sure I should," she said softly, thinking her own thoughts.

"Then start on it. It's yours, you know."

"Mine—this fairy-palace mine?" she asked, her eyes wide open in almost terrified surprise.

"It's included in the settlements," he said, avoiding her gaze.

"But surely," she cried, "Jocelyn can't accept all this from you. You're too, too generous."

"Well, I've had to fight him for it. He said he couldn't accept. He was most moderate in his demands. It's a hopeful sign."

But instead of receiving his assurance with gladness, she almost showed disappointment. Didn't she want to think well of Jocelyn, or was it that she disbelieved? And then presently she came out with a quick assent.

"Yes, I think it's a hopeful sign."

And he saw that she wanted to make reparation to the man whose name she was to bear. Oh, yes, she always did the right thing.

It filled her with a bitter-sweet pain, this prospect of spending two or three days, practically undisturbed, in the company of this man who had become all in all to her. And she remembered that she would have to make these days the provender on which to feed her heart during the long desolate future to come. But she would not let her-

self think of it. She would take the goods the gods gave without questioning—she would take a leaf out of Jocelyn's philosophy. Already there had descended on her a sense of trustful intimacy, of pleasing homeliness that filled her with a cheer she had never known. Oh—she stooped low over a wonderful specimen of Coptic ceramics to hide her blushing modesty—if this were but her home, and his!

He had ordered an early lunch, for there was much to do. And after lunch they sallied out to ransack the great West End emporia. Hazel simply thrilled with delight. She had momentarily doffed the mantle of her unhappiness and surrendered herself whole-heartedly to the joy of the hour. She felt a princess. Everywhere she was kowtowed from counter to counter, from magazine to magazine, by obsequious shopwalkers, who went on in front, making a royal way for her. At first, when she desired some specially beautiful thing, at a fabulous figure, she would lift shy eyes and ask:

"May I have this?"

And his good-humored answer would come forthwith:

"By all means, child. Buy up the whole place if that will save you any trouble."

And she would acknowledge him by a quick and dazzling: "Thank you." And presently she began to ask him merely by her glance, and he would nod his assent, smiling. Until at last she bought and bought broadcast, recklessly, without consulting him by word or look. The sense of acquisitiveness, the strongest primordial instinct in woman perhaps even more than man, had taken possession of her, not from greed, but because she saw that the more she acquired, the more she pleased him.

And then they came home to their *thé intime*. Immediately on entering Sir Clement had asked whether Joce-

lyn had called. It was not to be expected that he would take his temporary banishment so strictly. But Jocelyn had not called.

And then they repaired to the blue-and-gold drawing-room and Hazel sat down at the piano. Wonderful melodies floated or thundered up from under her hands. German symphonies, Hungarian rhapsodies, Polish nocturnes. Sir Clement listened, entranced. He had no idea that she was so perfectly mistress of the instrument.

Then she got up and, with a charming air of mystery, said she was going to fetch something. And from her little portmanteau she fished out one of her most cherished treasures, a volume of opera, and came back with it. And she sang. Her voice he knew—he had heard its dulcet richness both in sacred and secular songs. He did not know what she was singing, having no acquaintance with Puccini and his works. Puccini had not yet penetrated to the karoo. But he drank in the quaintly delightful Japanese lilt of the music. And so she went right through the opera, picking out its choicest bits, the enraptured love-joy of the little geisha, her inspired song of hope for her lover's return, up to the culmination of her despair, the threnody of a world well lost, Butterfly's heart-broken farewell to her child.

He heard the tears in Hazel's voice and a lump came into his throat. It was the tribute he paid to his own tragedy. And the music seemed to have brought comfort to him. Somehow it had conveyed to him a promise of far-off but not impossible consolation. In distant days he would think of this summer afternoon and be glad. And he had an inkling of the sweet sadness to which the poignancy of his sorrow would be tempered down. Oh, if only he already were as far! If he could but reach it with one magic bound, instead of having to plow his way

to it over jagged stones across the arid wastes. But the hope heartened him. Yes, he would reach Gilead at last —if only there to lay down his weary head and sleep the great sleep.

He sprang to his feet.

"Come on, Hazel, we are going to dine out," he said with something of a natural cheerfulness. "Now please go and dress."

And she understood why he had ordered one of her evening-frocks and wraps to be sent home immediately.

He gasped when he saw her *en grande tenue*. A radiance was upon her that intoxicated the eye. And yet there was also that tinge of a sedate melancholy, that little droop about her mouth which hinted at a hidden ache and which only set her insouciant beauty into stronger relief.

"This is the Savoy," he informed her, as they entered the noble rooms.

"Is it?" she asked indifferently.

The name conveyed nothing to her. It should have brought her the recollection that this was the place where Jocelyn was staying. But whether it did or did not, she did not signify either by word or look. And he was surprised that it did not seem to occur to her that she owed him some little gratitude for his thoughtfulness in bringing her here where there was a chance of meeting her affianced husband.

But Jocelyn was nowhere to be seen. At last, leaving her on some pretext, Sir Clement went and inquired. The waiter presently brought information, not much of it. Yes, Mr. Webster had been there, had had lunch in his rooms, gone out immediately afterwards and not returned. His key was hanging up in the office.

Sir Clement scribbled a note, telling him they were there and where they were sitting, leaving it to be delivered to

him in case he came back. They lingered at their table for two hours, both of them glad to find distraction in the gay and animated scene, but no Jocelyn appeared.

"I think we'll be off home now, little girl," Sir Clement said at last. "You must be tired—all that shopping."

She acknowledged his words with a wan little smile. Her good spirits had effervesced as the evening drew on. She realized how quickly her time with him would flash by. But for him the day held yet a great experience. The quick pressure she gave his hand, as he helped her into the taxi, did what all the champagne had not done. It sent the blood swirling to his head, it made his heart throb with a furious exultation as though his life-current had been changed into the ichor of the gods. Before he retired he asked if Jocelyn had 'phoned up. He had not. Sir Clement shook his head. The young beggar, what the dickens was he up to?

They had breakfast rather late, and Sir Clement went out as soon as it was over. He had various things to do, the special license and Mason, among others. But chiefly there was Jocelyn.

CHAPTER IX

UNWELCOME VISITORS

HAZEL was in the sitting-room, busy with the boxes which had begun to arrive. Lovingly her eager hands unfolded the dainty fabrics with the enthusiastic and admiring help of one of the maids. Presently there entered Mrs. Pink and informed her that two ladies had called to see her, but would not give their names.

"Two ladies?" Hazel echoed in surprise. "There must be some mistake. I'm not expecting anybody."

"They said they wanted to see Miss Middleton, which is you, Miss, I believe. Shall I send them away?"

"No, I suppose I had better see them," said Hazel, feeling vaguely troubled.

The two ladies came in—Mrs. Hobhouse and Miss Clavering.

"Oh, Mrs. Hobhouse—I am glad to see you. Won't you sit down?" said Hazel, trying to simulate pleasure where she felt nothing but a disagreeable astonishment. Something in Mrs. Hobhouse's manner kept her from putting out a tentative hand.

That manner exhaled a Rhadamanthine austerity, an injured rectitude that had been stricken to the heart. She swept an inquisitorial look over Hazel, over the maid, over the room and finished up with a snort.

"Sit down? Certainly not, till I know more. Will you kindly send the maid away?"

"Please go, Mary," said Hazel. "Yes, Mrs. Hobhouse, I am at your service."

"At my service? I thought I was to be at yours."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hobhouse?"

"What do you want of me, Miss Middleton?"

"Want of you?" asked Hazel, bewildered.

"Don't dilly-dally. What am I to do for you?"

"Why, nothing that I know of," gasped Hazel.

"Then what about the telegram?" broke in Josephine.

"Hush, Josephine," said Mrs. Hobhouse, turning to her, displeased. "Don't be so indiscreet and leave me to handle this. I think I am quite capable. Miss Middleton, I won't say anything about your discourtesy in not giving your address to the governing body before you went away. But that is an irregularity which appears to be the smallest part of this extraordinary episode. Of course it wouldn't have suited your plans. I understand from Miss Witherspoon, who refused further information, that you had gone up to town on important private business. Will you kindly specify the importance?"

"If you will excuse me, I would rather not."

"I presume so. This is Sir Clement's place, isn't it? Mr. Webster went up with you. Is he staying here?"

"Really, Mrs. Hobhouse, I don't know what right you have to ask that question, but I may tell you he is not."

"Then what are you doing in Sir Clement Barradine's flat all by yourself?"

"That question I don't feel inclined to answer."

"I ask it as a governor of the school."

"I don't care in what capacity."

"Well, I never thought that of Sir Clement," said Mrs. Hobhouse, addressing Josephine.

"Nor did I, mother," joined in the latter, with a sorrowful and disappointed air.

"Didn't think what?" asked Hazel, seemingly more and more puzzled.

"Miss Middleton, I'm not surprised at Sir Clement protecting you through thick and thin—the word, I believe, has an unpleasantly significant meaning," said Mrs. Hobhouse. "But it seems an act of Providence that the discovery has not been long delayed. Perhaps it still is not too late."

"In heaven's name, Mrs. Hobhouse, too late for what?" asked Hazel with a helpless gesture.

Josephine turned on her brutally.

"Don't you really grasp the situation, girl, or is it just spoof?" she exclaimed vehemently.

"Josephine!" Mrs. Hobhouse reproved her. "Although you are speaking in the presence of a person beyond, or perhaps, beneath consideration, remember that I am also here."

"Oh, rats!" muttered Josephine.

Angry tears had come into Hazel's eyes.

"I don't know why you are embarrassing me like this," she cried. "I don't in the least know why you are here and I don't want to see you. I have no idea what you are referring to. Please go, unless you want to wait for Sir Clement in the drawing-room."

"I don't wish to see Sir Clement," said Mrs. Hobhouse loftily. "I haven't the faintest desire ever to set eyes on him again. Has he bought you all these?" And she indicated the confections spread about the room.

"Yes, aren't they pretty?" asked Hazel, with the most brazen face she could assume, which wasn't much.

"It stands to reason that he would buy you pretty things. They usually do under the circumstances." And then she took on an air of ponderous solemnity. "Miss Middleton, you have not deserved it of me, but I still have your best interests at heart. Leave this place and come away with us. Whether your position at the school

is still tenable after this, I must leave to my fellow-directors. The most important thing for the moment is to save you from yourself."

"But I don't want to be saved from myself, I don't want to come away with you!" cried Hazel hotly.

"Then the consequences be on your own head!" said Mrs. Hobhouse funereally.

She turned to the door and then paused again.

"I think it is only due to ourselves to prove to you that we have taken no undignified steps to discover your whereabouts. This will be sufficient evidence."

She held out to Hazel, at arm's length, a buff-colored slip. The telegram was dated from a London post office and read:

"Please come at once to 3 Tudor Square. Urgent." And the signature was "Hazel Middleton."

Hazel shook her head in utter bewilderment.

"I don't know anything about it—I didn't send it," she faltered.

"I'm quite sure you didn't. It was sent apparently, in your name, by some kind friend who wishes to remain anonymous. I will give you one more chance, Miss Middleton. Are you coming away with us?"

"Good morning," said Hazel, leaving them to find their way out by themselves.

As soon as she was alone again, she dropped into a chair and gave vent to her feelings. Would they never leave off pursuing her, those abominable women? From the first instant, of course, she had caught the trend of their vile insinuations. But she had carried it off bravely, refusing to give them the satisfaction of letting them see how they hurt her. And, oh, how they had hurt her! What had she ever done that one living being should think

of her so meanly? A wild rage against Jocelyn seized her. He had been the cause of this journey to London and this subsequent humiliation. Had he been there at that moment, she would have flung his offer back in his face and rushed off to where she could weep away her bitterness of heart in silence and solitude. And she sobbed and sobbed, as if the floodgates of her grief would never close again. In the agony of her distress she even forgot to wonder at the mystery of that telegram.

She had regained something of her self-control shortly before Sir Clement came back.

"Why, Hazel, you've been crying!" he said in great concern.

"Yes, it was very foolish of me to let myself get so upset," she smiled feebly.

"Who—what upset you?"

"Mrs. Hobhouse and Miss Clavering have been here."

"What's that?" he asked, taken aback. "What did they come for?"

"To ask questions and say things. Their chief purpose was to save my immortal soul."

"This is most extraordinary," he said with wrinkled brows. "What a pity I wasn't here."

"Yes," she agreed regretfully. She had an idea he would have dealt with the situation much better than she.

"What on earth brought them?"

"They showed me a telegram, signed with my name, asking them to come. They are about the last persons on earth to whom I would wire."

"I suppose so," he said thoughtfully. "And then?"

"Then they went away," she said simply.

He remained silent. She could see that he was rapidly turning the matter over in his mind, but from an aspect

that was probably new to her. At last he seemed to come to some conclusion. But he did not voice it. Instead he asked:

"Has Jocelyn been here this morning?"

"Jocelyn? No."

If she had to tell him the truth she would have had to confess that the only time that Jocelyn had entered her mind that day was when she indulged in that brief access of anger against him. Even then he had not held her thoughts for long.

"Nor 'phoned up, I presume."

He did not tell her that on the way back he had called at the hotel. He was told that Mr. Webster was not there. He had not slept there that night and nothing had been seen of him since he went out the afternoon before. Were the rooms to be kept on? Sir Clement really did not recollect whether he had said yes or no.

His face clouded as he harked back on the thoughts with which he had left the hotel. He would not like Hazel to know them for worlds. Again he saw red as the inwardness of it came back to him. This was indeed indecorous, unconscionable. Jocelyn evidently thought fit to spend the last few days of his bachelorhood in riotous abandonment, to have a last wild fling. It was against all the rules of common decency. Apparently he thought it nothing to come to his pure young bride, giving off the tainted fumes of night-clubs and gambling-dens. Instead of preparing himself for the new life as for a sacrament, he sat in the cloacæ of human foulness, reveling in his degradation. Sir Clement thought how he would have felt if he had been in Jocelyn's place. And he called to mind a certain adage about a silk purse and a sow's ear.

Hazel had approached him timidly.

"Well, Clement, what are you going to do about it?"

She had dropped into the familiar appellation since yesterday and neither had made it a subject for comment.

"About what, my dear?"

He had honestly forgotten the incident with which her mind was still greatly occupied.

"About Mrs. Hobhouse, and what she said."

"Oh, about Mrs. Hobhouse."

He made a large, negligent movement of his hand.

"Surely, my dear child, you are not worrying about that? We can afford to ignore the yelping of mongrels. As soon as you present yourself to them as Mrs. Jocelyn Webster, their slanderous tongues will shrivel up in their mouths. There is no need to do anything."

"You don't think so, Clement?"

"I certainly don't."

"Then we certainly won't," she said with a gay humility. What better could she do than to defer to his sapient strength?

He was impatient and fidgety. He could not let Jocelyn slide like that. Something had to be done about him. He ought to make inquiries at Scotland Yard. He was casting about for an excuse for slipping out again without alarming her as it was within a short time of lunch, when the telephone bell tinkled. Hazel, who was standing nearest, made an instinctive dart towards it, then drew back and looked at Sir Clement. He smiled, compassionately, for he guessed her thoughts. Poor little child, apprehending danger and annoyance in every call from the outside world. He took up the receiver with a feeling of relief, for he guessed it would be Jocelyn. But it was not Jocelyn.

"Hullo. That Sir Clement Barradine's place?"

"Sir Clement speaking."

"This is St. Thomas's Hospital. Your cousin, Mr. Jocelyn Webster, was brought here yesterday afternoon. He



has just regained consciousness and is asking after you. Will you come along?"

The receiver almost fell from Sir Clement's hand. But his voice was superhumanly steady as he asked:

"Is he very bad?"

"You'll get all information when you call."

He turned away, trying to avoid Hazel's scrutiny and to appear unconcerned. Jocelyn dead! His heart stopped beating at the thought. No, Jocelyn must not die.

"Is who very bad, Clement?" she asked quietly.

"A friend of mine has met with an accident. I've got to go and see him at once."

"Do I know him, Clement?"

"No, you don't."

She said no more, seeming to be satisfied with his assurance. But he was not so certain of it. Did she refrain because she was afraid to hear that her world lay in ruins? Many thoughts crowded in on Sir Clement during that taxi drive. So that was why Jocelyn had not come. He was lying there in pain and suffering, perhaps on the threshold of the great shadow, when he had pictured him as riotously draining the goblet of life to the dregs. And even now he might be drinking of the cup of death. The tears came into his eyes. How cruelly unjust he had been to the poor boy.

Now too he saw the meaning of that madcap freak of his, the telegram. From the first moment he had not had the slightest doubt that Jocelyn had sent it. He had not been able to understand what hare-brained impulse had driven him to it. Had he intended it as a practical joke? And yet Mrs. Hobhouse was hardly the person on whom he would perpetrate such a joke. Not that Jocelyn would have been prevented by the augustness attaching to her.

A far different motive underlay that telegram. Sir Clement could not help thinking of it with a great emotion.

Mrs. Hobhouse had been the dearest friend of Jocelyn's mother. There was, indeed, some relationship. Jocelyn had had the run of her house all during his orphaned boyhood. What more natural than that he should want her present at the ceremony, simple but solemn, that marked the great turning-point in his life? He had been afraid to mention it to Hazel, knowing their antagonism. He had sent the telegram in Hazel's name as a sign of the burying of the hatchet. He did not know what was going to happen and he had, of course, meant to be there at their meeting and gloss over any acerbity that might still be felt. So at least his marriage would not be shorn for him of all his most cherished associations, it would be sanctioned, as it were, by his dead mother's presence. A noble thought, one that did him all honor.

Sir Clement wondered how he could ever retrieve himself with Jocelyn. He mentally craved his pardon for all his harsh thoughts, his harsh words. And most of all for the lurking jealousy with which he had regarded his good fortune. He was glad that, without knowing what he knew, he had decided to make him all the compensation he could. He was glad that Hazel was to have a husband in whom, beneath all the tinsel of haphazardness and frivolity, there beat a generous heart. Keenly, as never before, he felt the love he bore his cousin, the love for a wayward younger brother.

With heavy steps and a heavier heart he entered the portals of the great metropolitan Samaria. He sent in his card, and very soon one of the house-surgeons appeared and took his proffered hand respectfully.

"Yes, Sir Clement. Your cousin came here yesterday.



A motor accident. He was driving himself and crashed into a tram-car. He was flung clean out."

"Will he live?" Sir Clement asked tremulously.

"Oh, dear, yes. It's a bad case, but there is absolutely no danger to life. A few broken ribs and, of course, a severe shaking. His unconsciousness merely saved him a good few hours of suffering. No trepanning will be necessary and, as far as we have been able to ascertain, there is no internal lesion."

"How does he take it, poor fellow?"

"Well, not with the best of grace. He's very downcast and thinks he's going to die. He mumbled something about it being very awkward."

"It is. He was going to be married to-morrow."

"That's very unfortunate," smiled the doctor sympathetically. "But it seems to me more of a mental than physical case. I think he has something on his mind. I suppose you will be able to find out. If he talks, let him go on as much as he likes and get it off his chest. He'll be all the better for it."

"Thank God it's no worse," said Sir Clement.

"Yes, it might have been. If you stay a moment I'll see whether you can go in."

Sir Clement remained behind, not at all reassured by his own gratitude nor by the doctor's glib words. It was a way doctors had. They knew that in a case of sickness they often had to treat not only their patients, but those patients' hale friends. And he had let his anxiety peer too much out of his eyes. Nor was the sight he saw while he waited calculated to set his misgivings at rest. A bleeding wreck, cruelly torn by the fangs of machinery, was brought in from the ambulance outside, wheeled by on a trolley, eyes closed in a swoon of pain, limbs, swathed

in hasty appliances, a-quiver with a flickering mockery of life. If he were to find Jocelyn like this, if Jocelyn were to die! It was most essential that Jocelyn should not die.

The doctor had reappeared.

"This way, Sir Clement."



CHAPTER X

JOCELYN'S BRIGHT IDEA

THEY entered the darkened chamber—a private room—with noiseless step. The mass of white bandages on the bed stirred.

"Who's that?" it cried. The voice was clear and strong and very little different from the usual.

"Your cousin, Mr. Webster," replied the doctor.

Sir Clement stood at the bedside, looking down through a misty blur.

"Sorry to see you like this, Joss, boy."

"Yes, fine thing to be lying here, trussed up like a fowl. No, I can't shake hands."

"Yes, you can," said the doctor warmly. "Your right arm isn't hurt a bit."

"It feels lame," said Jocelyn, and somehow there seemed to be also a certain lameness about his words.

"Oh, that won't do, Mr. Webster!" cried the doctor cheerily. "You must make an effort and help us pull you through."

"I'll never get through," said Jocelyn gloomily.

Sir Clement drew the other man aside.

"Tell me the worst, doctor."

"Don't take notice of what he says," came the whispered reply. "That's his cry all the time. They're often taken like that—reaction, you know. But you'd better take our word against his, Sir Clement. I warrant you we'll have him out and about again inside of four weeks."

"That's splendid—I shall be ever so much obliged to

you," said Sir Clement joyfully as the doctor, nodding to the nurse to follow, left the room.

Sir Clement tiptoed back and sat down on a chair close to the bed. Jocelyn had heaved over, turning his back on him.

"Damn!" he said suddenly.

"Yes, it's an awful nuisance, isn't it, Joss?" remarked Sir Clement, trying to follow the other's thoughts. "But keep still, boy. Don't talk if you had rather not."

"But I want to talk," said Jocelyn, sitting up all at once with astonishing energy. "I've got several things to say to you, Clem, and I'm hanged if they'll come easy."

"Then don't say them. What on earth possessed you to be so careless?"

"I don't know. I seemed to have the devil in me. I'm not sure that I didn't try conclusions with that tram on purpose."

"Joss, don't say that!" Sir Clement exclaimed reproachfully. "Trying to commit suicide before your wedding day? What for? Exuberance of spirits? That's the latest form of madness."

Jocelyn had thrown himself down again full length, and it was plain to Sir Clement that he was trying to master a powerful inward agitation.

"What about that wedding, anyway, Clem?"

"The doctor thinks it won't have to be postponed for longer than a month."

"Longer, much longer, Clem. For six months, a year, forever."

"Nonsense, Joss. You'll be over this long before."

"I won't, and what's more I don't want to."

Sir Clement thought of the doctor's words. Jocelyn's was a natural hallucination. Still it seemed to be based on something tangible, actual. Something obsessed his



mind. So he held himself in leash, waiting for what would develop.

"Does Hazel know?" Jocelyn asked at last.

"No, I haven't told her anything—unless she guesses."

"It's just as well."

There was a deeper, huskier note in his voice, and it sounded jaded, as if his previous exertions had overtaxed his strength.

"Hadn't I better go and call nurse?" asked Sir Clement.

"Clem, you offered to shake hands with me before, and I wouldn't," said Jocelyn almost solemnly. "The doc knew it was an excuse, and so it is. I'm quite as capable of using my arms as ever. Only I shall never shake hands with you again, or, rather, you with me. But I hope you'll come to my funeral."

"I don't understand you at all, Joss," said Sir Clement, sitting very still. "Are you sure you're not rambling?"

"They wouldn't have let you in if I were. Seems to me my five senses is all I have saved out of the smash-up."

"Well, then, use 'em, Joss, and don't make me nervous."

"Yes, Clem, I'll use 'em. In the first place I want to tell you that I never meant this wedding to come off at all, or if it did, I had taken precautionary steps to undo it as soon as possible."

"I always knew you were a clever boy, Joss."

"Spare me your sarcasm. For once in a way you'll find that I had really done a clever thing, a damnably clever thing. It wasn't moral, but then I'm not quite clever enough to combine cleverness with morality."

"If you have anything to say to me, Joss, let me have it," said Sir Clement stiffly. He had begun to see that Jocelyn's dilatory maunderings were really leading up to something important.

"Yes, I'll tell you, and as this is a death-bed confession,

don't cut up too rough," said Jocelyn, more composedly. "I don't suppose I ever really loved Hazel. It pleased my vanity to go swaggering about with the prettiest girl for miles. It's no lack of compliment to her, for I'm sure I shall never feel different to any other girl either. I was only mad on her when I saw her. When I was away from her I don't think I ever gave her a thought. Of course, she didn't see through me—she took me for gospel. And then she started nagging about my making a living and all that. That wasn't at all in my line. My only strong point was to walk about with my hands in my pockets where, with Uncle Jacques or you to fall back on, I could easily afford to keep them."

He paused and Sir Clement found nothing to say. He felt that these were only preliminaries and that he was standing on the brink of some still more horrible revelation.

"I don't know what I might do now if I had another chance," Jocelyn went on mournfully. "Things appear to me different since yesterday. I suppose there's a crack in my head after all, despite what the quacks say, and some daylight filtered into me. And now we come to Mrs. Hobhouse. Has she been down?"

Sir Clement nodded—he could not trust himself to speak.

"I was sure she would come hot-foot. She can always be counted upon where there's any mischief to be done."

"What mischief?" Sir Clement asked, holding himself in with an iron hand.

"I was getting ready anticipatory evidence. The idea came to me as I saw you two driving off together from the station. If you had forced me to marry Hazel, I had my little scheme to fall back on. She had been staying at your flat, all alone with you, for two or three days. I'd have lugged her into court on grounds which, I could main-

tain, had come to my knowledge after the marriage. I might have got a divorce, or, at any rate, a separation."

"You infernal young jackanapes!" Sir Clement thundered at him.

"That's a term of endearment to what you really ought to call me, Clem," said Jocelyn sadly.

Sir Clement strode up and down the room, shaking with mirthless merriment as the humor of Jocelyn's bright idea got on to him more and more.

"Well, shall I call you an ingenuous babe? Yours must be a case of arrested mentality if you thought you could take in any judge and jury with such a preposterous story. Where do you get your notions of English law from?" He kicked contemptuously at a hassock he found in his path. "However, the intention was there, and that's good enough."

"Bad enough, you mean, Clem," Jocelyn corrected him.

"And now you had better get out of bed as quickly as possible. Our arrangement holds good."

"What arrangement?"

"About my clearing out."

"Clearing out to where, Clem? I still feel rather hazy about some things."

"I told you I was going to leave you master of Woodlands. I hardly thought you'd forget that."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. What about Hazel, though?"

"Hazel? Do you think I'd let her throw herself away on a cur like you? Hurry up. As soon as you're about again, I'm off."

"I'll never be about again," said Jocelyn, relapsing into his mood of hypochondriac self-commiseration. "I'm going to die. Won't you forgive me?"

"Stop that rot about dying," Sir Clement cried angrily. "You'll live to see how ridiculous you've been making your-

self. I'm afraid you won't get any harder punishment."

Jocelyn fell back with a little sigh.

"You had better tell Hazel, hadn't you?"

"Of course. That's where your admirable logic again shows up so brilliantly. You got me to propose to her as well, didn't you? You want me to do all your dirty work. Tell Hazel? That's the last thing on earth I would do. Jocelyn, Hazel is never to know of this. No occasion to cause her unnecessary distress. I'll fake up some excuse for things turning out as they did."

"But she won't be distressed, Clem."

"In your unfathomable wisdom you know everything. She might be."

"She won't," said Jocelyn obstinately. "She won't care a tinker's cuss about anything I have or have not done. It's your innings, Clem."

Sir Clement looked at him with stern inquiry.

"Marry her yourself, Clem. You've only to ask."

A fierce anger blazed up in Sir Clement at this trifling, as he considered it, with his holiest feelings.

"Thanks. I can do all the marrying I want without your assistance. Whatever advice you've got you'll need for yourself. I don't know what you think you still have to gain by soft-soaping me."

"I don't want to gain anything and I'm not soft-soaping you, Clem."

"Then hold your tongue."

Sir Clement looked round and his eyes fell on the telephone that stood on the night-table by the bedside.

"I'm going to use this," he said curtly, sitting down.

First he rang up "Telegrams" and despatched a wire to Kenneth Hobhouse, the Priory, Woodlands, to come and see him in town immediately. Then he got connected with the flat.

"That you, Hazel?"

"Yes, Clement. Where are you?"

"At the Club."

"How about your friend?"

"Getting on all right. Nothing serious. I rang up to let you know that I may not be back for some hours."

"Oh!"

The regret and disappointment in the monosyllable were unmistakable.

"Why, what's the matter? Anything happened?"

He was in constant dread now lest anything should befall her in his absence. He had not yet given any thought to the question as to who would be in dread for her when he had started on his last long absence.

"No, nothing at all," she replied with a half-hearted laugh. "What have you got on now?"

"Some important business I must settle before I get back. So long, Hazel. Any news of Jocelyn yet?" he went on, feeling he had to keep up the pretense.

"No, unless you have some, Clement."

He made no reply to this last and replaced the receiver.

"Is there anything I can do for you before I go?" he asked, turning back to Jocelyn.

"Yes, Clem, there is," said Jocelyn wistfully.

"Spit it out."

"There's that handshake you offered me when you came in. Will you let me have it when you say good-by?"

Sir Clement hesitated.

"Oh, Clem, do," begged Jocelyn. "I feel so miserable."

Quickly the other went up to him and held out his hand.

"If it pleases you, it won't hurt me," he said more softly.

Then he walked out. He strode down the long corridor, hugging the wall, hanging his head. He was glad he did not meet the doctor who had taken him to Jocelyn. He

knew his thoughts were printed on his face. The place was rank with the smell of iodine and anesthetics and he hurried out into the open, choking for a breath of clean air.

And now for the important business of which he had spoken to Hazel. It was, of course, none other than Hazel herself. What was he to do with her, how unravel the hopeless tangle of things Jocelyn had made?

CHAPTER XI

MRS. HOBHOUSE AS CUPID

For two hours he perambulated the purlieus of the West End, mingling with the crowd of sleek, well-dressed men and women. He disliked contact with them, till he reminded himself that this might be one of the last occasions when he would rub shoulders with the outside world. In the places to which he was going back he knew he would strain many a long day for the sight of one of his kind, would have to content himself with the company of apes chattering in the trees and be grateful to Darwin.

But Hazel? He had almost despaired of finding a solution, when all at once it impinged on his brain. He jumped into a taxi and drove home, as though fearful that any delay might jeopardize his fixed design.

She met him with a glad little cry of pleasure.

"Why, you're back sooner than you thought, aren't you?"

"Yes, Hazel, there wasn't anything to stay away for. Unfortunately I got through my business much more quickly than pleased me. Sit down. I have to talk to you very seriously."

She obeyed at once, greatly troubled by the ominous tenor of his words.

"I have just met Jocelyn at the lawyer's. We went into the question of ways and means, and a rather absurd state of affairs revealed itself. The long and short of it, Hazel, is that there isn't money enough to make a decent settlement."

"Isn't there, really?" she asked quickly.

"Of course it's my fault. I should have kept myself better posted about my financial condition. I have been grossly over-rating the value of the estate, I won't quite say outrunning the constable."

"Yes, and look at the lot of money you spent on me yesterday!"

He could not help laughing at her ingenuousness, but immediately became grave again.

"Naturally you could not expect Jocelyn to marry you unless he were put in a position to keep you in adequate style."

"Oh, no, certainly not," she said eagerly. "Jocelyn can't very well marry a penniless girl."

"That isn't so much the point. But I have come to the conclusion that, in any case, it would be advisable for Jocelyn not to marry at all for the present."

"I think so too."

The words came impetuously. Her face had become flushed with a strange excitement and she was shifting restlessly in her seat.

"I'll send him for a tour round the world. Now the question, my dear girl, is—what is to become of you?"

"Well, I can always go back to the school, can't I?" she said slowly.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said with a perturbed air.

"Why, what's to prevent me?"

"Mrs. Hobhouse, I'm afraid."

"What has Mrs. Hobhouse to do with it?" she cried in surprise.

"Rather more than is agreeable to me. You know she saw you here. She hinted plainly at the inference she drew. Hazel, I have to tell you the brutal truth. I have compromised you. There will be little of your reputation left now that it has got into Mrs. Hobhouse's hands."

She looked at him incredulously.

"Surely, Clement, you are saying that as a joke."

"I wish I were, Hazel."

She saw the seriousness in his eyes and shrank back with a cry of alarm.

"I seem to be making nothing but blunders," he went on. "I should not have left anything to chance. There was no reason why we shouldn't have brought Tabitha up with us. We could have closed the school for a couple of days."

"I won't have you always blaming yourself!" she cried vehemently. "For one thing I'm sure that Jocelyn would have objected to Tabitha. And for another, who could have foreseen that I would leave this place as anything but Jocelyn's wife?"

"That is so," he said dully.

"I'm sure you're making a trouble about nothing, Clement," she continued, more hopefully. "All we have to do is to tell the truth. That would certainly be quite sufficient explanation. Of course, we need not say why the marriage did not take place."

"Yes, that would be an explanation," he said, wrinkling his brows. "Only it would sound too ingenious."

"But there's Jocelyn as a witness."

"No use at all. He would be turned down at once. He would naturally be expected to give evidence that went in your favor, if only from chivalry."

"But surely you are strong enough to deal with this, Clement," she said stiffly.

"I'm not, I'm sorry to say, Hazel. I can't possibly take up the cudgels on your behalf because I am the interested, or rather, the accused party."

There was a petrified pause.

"Very well, then," she said at last in a strangled voice. "I shall get another post."

"You can't, Hazel. You will have to give references and testimonials from Woodlands, and those you will get from there will hardly be fit to give."

"I'll get a place in some office. I can do typing and shorthand."

"The same difficulty will arise there as well."

She had suddenly become deathly pale. There was a hunted look in her face. She felt herself chased from pillar to post, she had run everywhere for a means of escape, and everywhere she had been confronted by a cul-de-sac.

"No, I can see only one way out of the predicament," he said, almost ponderously.

"No, don't tell me, I don't want to know!" she cried, flinging up her hands to her face with a moan of despair. "I don't care if there is a way out of it or not. I only want to die—to die. There's nothing else left for me."

"Before you talk of dying, I would suggest your considering the remedy I propose," he said, gently reproachful.

She lifted her eyes vacantly. Then she asked, after a long time:

"What do you propose?"

"A proposal. The only thing you can do, Hazel, is to marry me."

And now she sat staring at him with wide open eyes.

"To give me back my reputation?"

"It's the only practical thing to do."

She suddenly burst into a shrill, hysterical laugh.

"How funny! So Mrs. Hobhouse is our Cupid!"

"If you like to regard her so. We all play many parts in our lives and Mrs. Hobhouse cannot expect to be an exception. I know mine is a clumsy way, but it is the best I have."

"And therefore you are asking me to marry you, just as

you would ask me to have some bread-and-butter. But, of course, it pretty well comes to that, doesn't it?"

"I admit it's a question of expediency, of making the best of a bad job, Hazel. I know I'm not Jocelyn. I can't, in my slow, lumbering, middle-aged jog-trot, compare with the victorious rush of his youth. But, under the conditions, it will hardly matter."

"How does your marrying me fit in with your idea of going away?" she asked with a cold suddenness.

"I was coming to that. The one will not interfere with the other. All I really have to do is to give you my name."

"Yes, that will be ample," she said with biting irony.

"If it is enough, Hazel, I offer it to you."

"Thank you. I will think it over."

She got up suddenly and left the room.

She was stunned by his words. He had offered to make her his wife, that wonderful consummation she had only dared to hope for in her dreams, and the reality had filled her with a repugnance that sickened her to death. Oh, if there had been but one spark of feeling behind his utterance, if there had been the faintest quiver of sentiment, of tenderness in it—how she would have leapt into his arms! But this cold, prosaic suggestion, this argumentative pro and con, it had turned her blood to water, an icy water that chilled her to the heart.

CHAPTER XII

HAZEL DOES NOT ANSWER

Two hours later came Ken, looking troubled and preoccupied.

"What's all this pother about, Clem?" he asked as soon as he entered.

"Referring to what, Ken?"

"My step-mater has been round—just caught me on the hop as I was leaving—and said that I owed it as a duty to decency to quit immediately the service of a man like you. I sent her to the right-abouts, but not before she had inflicted some of her jaw on me. What is it, Clem?"

"So she has started on her scandal-mongering."

"You may be sure she wouldn't lose any time where any scandal is to be mongered. But I'm sorry that Hazel is mixed up in it."

"No more than I am, you may be sure," said Sir Clement grimly. "Who the deuce knew it was going to turn out like that?"

"Not you. Whatever you meant you meant for the best, Clem."

"Thank you, Ken. I'll tell you all about it."

And he did. But he did not refer to his way out of the predicament.

"Awkward, deuced awkward," commented Ken, shaking his head rather dolorously.

"However, I haven't asked you to come up merely to inflict this jeremiad on you."

"What, more trouble?"

"That will be as you like to take it."

Sir Clement walked up and down the room meditatively. He evidently found it hard to come to the point.

"Well, Ken, and now I've got to talk about myself."

"I wish you had done more of that all along."

"Maybe you'll think this will be too much of me. I'm afraid, Ken, that what I'm going to say may come hard on you. You remember some time ago suggesting that we make a clean sweep of it and go off into the unknown."

"Yes, and I'm still game for it. When do we start?"

"In your program there'll only be a slight alteration. I'm going alone."

"That's beastly unsociable of you."

"I'm sorry, Ken. There are no monasteries in Central Africa, but I have the same purpose to serve."

"What, going to turn Trappist? Good Lord, Clem, has it ever occurred to you what you'll be like after ten years of it? You're still a young man."

"What do I care what I'll be like? I have no one to study, and the people I'll come across—if ever I come across any—will have to take me as they find me—my old stock-phrase."

"I can see it's no good arguing, Clem, and I must let you have your way," said Ken with a sigh. "But I'm damned sorry. Don't be surprised if one of these days I come to track you down."

"Save yourself the trouble. You'll be looking for a needle in a haystack."

"Never mind about that. Now to the great question. What about the estate? Won't that be rather complicated?"

"Not in the least. The estate is going, lock, stock and barrel, to Jocelyn."

"The devil it is!"

"After all he has the first claim on it. I did him out of it by the closest shave. To whom else am I to let it go? I don't want to spring an unpleasant surprise on the boy."

"By Jingo, I would. Sooner than let it go to that young ass, I would hand it over to the Society for Providing Crippled Monkeys with Artificial Limbs."

"I don't suppose you'd care to stay under him, would you?"

"Blowed if I would."

"Then I'll have to look after you, Ken. I think I've been paying you a miserable salary. You'll have to let me make up the arrears in the shape of a bonus."

Ken blinked rapidly several times.

"You put it nicely. Well, if it's doing you a favor I won't refuse. Then I can go back to my old business, on different lines. I shall only be too happy to do Jocelyn out of all I can. Now what about Hazel?"

"I don't know. It depends on the answer she gives me. I've asked her to marry me. I want to let her have my name."

"You dolt! If you do that, she'll have to have the estate as well."

"She won't take it, I know her for that. She'll just take my name, if she'll do that much, and nothing more. And if she'll have the estate and it will be an inducement to Jocelyn to have her and the estate as well, well, they can settle that between 'em," said Sir Clement harshly.

"Then you'll have to be dead first."

"I've arranged all that with Jocelyn."

"Yes, in fact you seem to have worked it out very nicely, with quite geometric precision. And as, I presume, it hasn't come quite easy for you, I hope that, for compensation, you'll find what you are looking for."

Sir Clement had taken again to striding up and down. A terrible expression had come over his face.

"I shan't find it, because I shall not look for it any more," he said, a steely ring in his voice. "I have given up hope and with hope the desire has gone. I shall struggle on to the end as best I can. And perhaps before I get there I may have to go through a phase that will turn me to the opposite extreme. I'll plunge into it up to my neck. I shall do all the killing that chance will offer, and perhaps I will go out of my way for it. My hands will run red with blood. God help any living thing that will cross my path when the mood is on me."

"As long as you don't shoot me at sight," said Ken with a strained sort of flippancy.

This new Clem was even worse than the old. The explosive revulsion in his feelings showed the utter hopelessness of him much more patently than all his burrowing, self-contained despair. And again there rose in Ken more strongly, more urgently than ever before, the wild desire to save his friend from what he would never make an effort to save himself. Yes, there was the hundredth chance, and he would take it if his own life went forfeit over it.

"Clem, before I go, I would like to know Hazel's answer."

"Yes, I have no objection to that. I'll call her in. She can tell me in your presence."

"Perhaps she won't like that."

"Why shouldn't she? It's no more than a business matter, and she won't mind an old friend."

"Yes, but even so," said Ken reflectively, "do you think that's quite the sort of proposal a girl would care for, although it's only the temporary arrangement you suggest?"

"It's the only one I can make her," said Sir Clement, and a twinge of pain flitted across his face. "We can't always do things as we want to, Ken."

"You're getting startlingly original, Clem. Shall I wait for her now?"

Sir Clement walked quickly to the door of the drawing-room, where, at Ken's entrance, he had heard her toying softly with the key-board, and knocked. There was no answer and he became aware that she was talking to some one on the telephone. To whom could she be talking, he wondered, though giving the incident no further thought. He waited patiently till she had finished, which he ascertained by the ting of the instrument, and then knocked again. Not getting any answer this time either, he tried the handle. The door was locked.

"Hazel!" he called softly.

There was silence.

"Hazel!" he called louder, but the silence continued, and he went away.

"She won't come," he told Ken.

The latter gave a shrug.

"I suppose she can't make up her mind. I don't blame her," he said a little sharply. "I've been looking at the Bradshaw. I'd have liked to get away again to-night, but no more trains. I must catch an early one in the morning."



CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT GOOD-BY

SIR CLEMENT did not see Hazel any more that night. She must have gone to her room immediately afterwards. Sir Clement took Ken up to his, but stayed up himself. That night Will Dallas came to him again—so he had followed him to London as he would follow him everywhere—but he hardly paid any attention to him. He would have plenty of time for Will later on. For the present he had to ponder on what Ken had said. Ken's words usually gave him food for reflection.

No, a girl did not like that sort of proposal. She had hinted as much herself. Perhaps there had been no need to be quite so blunt, to bring the utilitarian aspect of the question into such prominence. But it seemed to him that the whole case required reconsideration. It had taken to itself quite a new viewpoint since his talk with Ken. And, tossing about sleeplessly, he reconsidered it all night. And when the day came he had hammered out his issue.

She seemed to shun him. Early as he was, she had been still earlier with her breakfast, though the only sign of it he saw was a cup which had been used while the plate next to it had not. At last he came upon her in the sitting-room where she was putting on her hat.

"Where are you off to, Hazel?"

"For a little walk. It's such a beautiful morning."

"You've eaten nothing," he said sternly.

"All I wanted. I have to ask your pardon for locking your door on you last night."

"It was your door while you were on the inside of it.

But now that there is no door between us, may I ask you to listen to me for a few minutes?"

"Certainly," she replied, sitting down.

"I want to get it over as soon as possible," he said hurriedly, and his drawn features showed the tribulations of of that sleepless night. "Hazel, I want to withdraw the two of us from a false position. I don't know what decision you have arrived at, if any, but I wish to take back the offer I made you last night."

"I thought it was only a woman's prerogative not to know her mind," she said with a touch of scorn.

"Yes, but a man may take it for his privilege to undo a mistake as soon as he sees it," he replied, thoughtfully tracing a pattern on the tablecloth with his forefinger.

"Please go on," she said a little impatiently.

"It is kind of you to ask me to go on. I thought you would not wish me to proceed beyond my opening statement. So if you will permit me I will explain to you why I consider my offer a mistake. It wasn't fair to you. It isn't right that I should go away and leave you bound to me indefinitely. I had, as a matter of fact, mapped out a plan for releasing you from that bond, and that at no distant date. But it isn't safe. With all the most careful prearrangements things may go agley. We have just had a lamentable example of that, haven't we? And even if they didn't go wrong, you, with your punctilious mind, might not have deemed yourself free. Somebody might have been coming along for whom you cared, and then—well, and then the fat would have been in the fire."

He blurted out the colloquialism with a brusquerie that made it sound very harsh.

"I don't understand at all what you mean by plans and prearrangements and things going wrong," she said, gazing at him frankly. "Are you telling me all because you were afraid that my answer might have been in the affirmative?"

"To be candid, my thoughts didn't quite reach so far as to try to surmise your answer. But perhaps at the back of my mind there might have been a fear that it would be yes."

"And you didn't want it to be yes."

"No, frankly and honestly, no."

"Then, in spite of that, let me tell you that it would have been yes, if you had pressed me for an answer at once," she flung at him defiantly, her head lifted high. "But it would never have been, and it never will be, yes after that."

"Of course, you have had time to reflect."

"No, it was no reflection of mine that brought about the change," she said, and there was a pent-up concentration in her tone the cause of which he could not for the life of him fathom. "I don't know what pleasure it could have given you to keep on hoodwinking me like this, to make me stray in a fool's Paradise, to put me off—with inventions."

He had become very pale and disturbed, for he guessed that something had occurred for the emergency of which he had failed to make allowance.

"Well, at any rate I am glad that you don't brazen it out," she continued with a hard laugh. "I am not anxious to humiliate you more than I can help by confronting you with the truth. So the reason why the marriage could not take place is because the settlements would not permit it."

He made no answer, not knowing what entanglement she was preparing for him.

"And that, in any case, you thought that Jocelyn was not yet qualified for a married man. That last I don't dispute at all. But the other part of the statement you made deliberately, in the full knowledge that it wasn't true. I suppose you thought it a magnanimous thing to spare my feelings. It never occurred to you that that was the way one would treat a child, not a grown woman, that I would

prefer a million times to know the bare truth. Well, if you weren't brave enough to tell me, Jocelyn was."

"So it was to him you were talking last night," he said dully.

"He knew your fad for going along the lines of least resistance," she went on, ignoring, or rather disdaining his interruption. "Of course, there might have been a scene, I might have become hysterical—it would have been a nuisance to you. So you preferred to feed me with lies."

He listened to the terse staccato sentences that poured out of her in a hot flood of indignation.

"I admit it did not strike me that my action might lend itself to that interpretation," he said, gazing at her with a blank air of futility. "You see, I'm always making blunders, although you disputed it on a previous occasion. May I ask what else Jocelyn told you?"

"Nothing that I thought of consequence. Or if he did, I don't remember. I think he talked of making something right with you and going off to Canada if he got over this."

"Oh, did he?" said Sir Clement grimly. "Well, he can as little make this right with me as, apparently, I can make it right with you."

Then to his surprise he saw that she had her handkerchief to her eyes and her shoulders were shaking. He took an instinctive step towards her and then came to a halt. She seemed to have recovered herself partly.

"Excuse me," she murmured, "but I have gone through such a lot."

"Yes, my poor dear," he said fervently, "you have. God help you."

She sat up and he saw the struggle going on in her.

"I had to say all this, Clement, although it broke my heart to say it," she resumed. "After all, you have been so good to me."

"I have tried to be, Hazel."

"Will you forgive me for hurting you?" All the bitterness had faded from her voice and her eyes swam.

"You haven't been hurting me more now, Hazel, than you have been hurting me all the time."

"Hurting you—I?" she cried, shrinking in amazement.

"Not knowingly, of course. Hazel, Hazel, do you think I found it easy to speak to you as I did yesterday, to talk to you of a business arrangement, when—when . . ."

"When what?" she asked quickly.

He walked away to the window, standing with his back to her, and she walked about half way after him.

"When what, Clement?" she urged him again.

"I may as well tell you now—there may not be another chance," he said brokenly, facing round on her. "We are standing at the parting of our ways; no, we have got further even than that. And therefore I can call back to you across the distance that divides us: 'Hazel, I love you. I do so now and always have done. And no man has ever so loved a woman before.'"

She was flushing and paling by turns and made a little dart with her hand towards him.

"Clement, I have been waiting for that word," she murmured, almost inaudibly.

"Tabitha knew it all the time," he said vaguely.

"She knew that you loved me? Oh, why didn't she tell me, why didn't she tell me?"

Her voice trailed off in a whisper of passionate regret.

He stood stroking her hand soothingly, with a tenderness that set every nerve of hers aflame.

"Tabitha is a very wise woman," he said softly. "She had to walk warily lest she should frighten away the fluttering bird. I too walked warily, Hazel, dear, till now when there is no longer any need for caution. Now I can speak openly. I can make good to you the indignity of *setting* up Mrs. Hobhouse as our Cupid."

"Oh, don't repeat that horrible phrase!" she chid him between laughing and crying.

He drew away from her, his manner all at once chill and frozen, his eyes glinting hard. Her own followed him with a nameless fear.

"And now, Hazel, I must tell you why, in speaking to you of my love, I have done you the greatest wrong of all."

"Oh, why do you delight in terrifying me, in torturing me?" she cried, clenching her hands.

"There is nothing in me but love for you."

He made her sit down and waited till his own calmness had somewhat quelled the dread in her face.

"Hazel, you shall hear strange things. You shall know why I loved you and why I could never strive for your love in return. A hidden voice has been thundering in my heart all this time and perhaps I can still it a little by letting it for once speak out. Hazel, in the days back there, I committed a crime."

And then he told her all, extenuating nothing, embodying all the arguments he had had with Charley Dallas and with Ken, leaving no point untouched. When he had finished he found that her hand had stolen into his and that her eyes had taken to themselves the maternal look that comes to every true woman when she sees a strong man bear a great agony with clenched teeth and set lips that beg for neither help nor hope.

"There you have it, Hazel," he said at last, with a great heave of his chest. "Now you know the worst of me. I am at odds with my conscience and I must devote the rest of my days to making it evens again."

"Yes, yes," she cried, and the pained puzzlement in her tone cut him like a knife. "But I still don't understand the part I play in all this."

"I have called you Hazel, the Avenger. Hazel, does that tell you nothing?"

"Nothing, nothing!" she wailed. "I only know that I love you."

He sprang up.

"That is the word, the signal!" he cried, despair and exultation mingling in his voice. "Now I know that I must go. God has been merciful at last and shown me the way, the only way, by which I may attain to the Throne. And you will help me, Hazel, dear, will you help me?"

"If I could help you by dying, you know I would!"

"Then make yourself my sacrifice. And bear it with a brave heart. I have touched happiness, just touched and then let it go out of my reach of my own free will. If that doesn't count, nothing ever can or shall. I am giving up what to me is more than life. That ought to pay for the life I have taken. Will Dallas has no more claim on me. What do you think, my queen?"

"I can't think, Clement," she said, and her looks did not belie her words. "I won't even let it enter my mind that I am the price with which you are paying off your debt. Oh, no, dearest, my dearest, I should not have said that. I promised to help you. I will be your sacrifice, gladly. Oh, my own dear love, will it help you at all to go away knowing that somebody else is bearing half your burden?"

"It will not halve my burden, it will double it that you are the yoke-fellow of my distress. It will press harder on me to feel that you are suffering pain for my sake. And yet I shall have something to set against that. You will find comfort in helping me and I shall glory in your affliction. I will think of it all the while, and it will make me the proudest man on earth that such a one as you is shedding tears for me. It will break my heart to know that you are atoning with me, but I shall triumph in the thought that you have found me worthy of it. And supposing my heart is broken? The sooner the troublesome thing is put

out of gear, the sooner I shall find rest. You want me to find rest, don't you, Hazel?"

"You are so great, Clement—how shall I ever make myself fit for you?" she asked, looking up at him in aching wonder.

"By being happy, dearest one. You have done a great thing, the greatest a woman could ever achieve. Knowing what I stand to you for, I can only marvel at your heroic strength in letting me go instead of holding me back with weak, vain tears and entreaties. Find your compensation in that."

"I will try, my king," she said simply. "I will live out my years, solaced by my pride in you. When I am old and gray you will still be to me all that you are now."

"No, Hazel, I don't want you to do that," he said quickly. "I should like you to pay me your tribute for a little while, and after that I want to picture you as a happy wife, with beautiful children romping round your knee."

"Clement," she said suddenly, "before you go, would you mind marrying me? Then I should always belong to you and you only."

"No, Hazel," he said after a short pause. "I won't do that. The future I'm mapping out for you is better. You must be a real wife. You will find some one to take my place."

"Oh, you must not be greedy," she reproved him lovingly. "You can't have everything your own way. I know just what I am capable of. I should never be able to divide myself between my memory of you and my troth to somebody else. I shall always remember who has the prior claim."

"I should not mind coming second. That's quite a good place too."

"No, no," she said, shaking her head vehemently, "you

can't argue me out of it. I must also have my rights, Clement. You are leaving me my freedom and you must not tell me how to use it. Believe me, dearest, I shall make the best use of it I think."

She paused, and then asked, a great and trembling anxiety in her question:

"Shall I ever hear from you, Clement?"

"No, never, Hazel."

"I knew that would be your answer," she said with a broken sob. "When men like you make an offering of themselves, they don't do it by halves. I shall bear even that, Clement."

"I shall pass out of your life, Hazel," he said, following his own train of thought, "but I shall always be with you, even as you have been with me all these weeks, these months. My spirit will bear you company and listen to every beat of your heart. Waking and sleeping it will watch over you. It will hover near you at your work, it will follow you when you go plucking flowers in the fields. In sunshine and rain I shall be with you, always with you. Will that please you, Hazel?"

"Will it please me? And now you shall hear my attestation," she cried, her eyes shining moistly, her voice lifting on the lyrical note he had struck. "In the wilds to which you are going you shall hear me whisper comfort to you by night and by day. I shall stand by you, invisible yet manifest, heartening you in your tasks, helping you lift the stumbling-blocks out of your path. And when you sit resting, you will feel my hand passing gently over you, wiping the moisture from your brow, fanning the fever out of your throbbing temples. And my benediction shall echo to you out of the trill of every bird, out of the breath of the soughing breeze, out of the roar of the tempest. Will that be enough?"

He stood up straight before her, and out of his face spoke the hungry pain that consumed him.

"This alone should bring me forgiveness," he said hoarsely. "Yes, this one thing alone. I have stood eye to eye with you, your hand in mine, I have heard you tell me that you love me, and my lips have not touched yours."

"But they shall, they shall!" she cried with a sobbing laugh. "You shall not rob me of that at least."

And wildly she flung her arms round his neck and drew his face down to hers.

And so Ken found them as he burst into the room and then backed out again with a hasty: "Oh, I'm sorry."

It was to them the call of the waking world. In a moment they had left their soaring altitudes and came down to earth again. He stood, holding her by both hands and said quietly:

"Hazel, I have to make one last request to you."

"It is granted, dearest."

"Now, mind, you must not go back on that. Hazel, you will find things hard. There is your livelihood to consider. I dare say you will find work, but I hate the thought of leaving it to chance. Let me provide for you, my dearest dear. Say that you will take that anxiety off my mind."

"Oh, gladly, gladly," she answered him instantly. "I shall be proud and happy to eat your bread. It will be ambrosia to me."

"Thank you, dearest one."

It was a glad thought to him that neither of the two people he loved best had made any difficulty in accepting the last token of his love.

Ken had insisted on having his breakfast in the kitchen so as to save the maids trouble. He did not mind at all. The sight he had seen in the sitting-room would have given

him an appetite anywhere. Just as he finished he met Sir Clement coming out and followed him.

"Is it all right, Clem?" he asked with a twinkle.

"Yes, Ken, quite all right."

"Then may I congratulate you?"

"Yes, I suppose it deserves some congratulation," said Sir Clement thoughtfully.

And that was how Ken came to make his mistake.

"Well, I wouldn't look so glum about it, old chap," he said teasingly. "You promised that I would be present at the momentous interview. But I don't suppose I was particularly wanted."

"No, Ken, we managed very well without you."

"I suppose that knocks the Africa project on the head. Unless you mean to take her out with you there for your honeymoon. Have you discussed that important matter at all?" asked Ken, talking for talking's sake, for he did not at all like the shadow on Clem's face. "Come, come, old chap. You've got your girl. Send the bogies to blazes. What's worrying you now?"

"It's nagging here and here," said Sir Clement, indicating his heart and head.

And from that Ken saw that his work was still necessary. Indeed, more necessary than ever. If Clem still remained hag-ridden, when he should himself be riding proud steeds away into the empyrean, then the work, such as it was, needed taking in hand at once.

"I'm catching the ten-fifteen, Clem. I suppose I'll be seeing you soon."

"Yes, in a couple of days."

And he did not know that it would be much sooner. And also he did not know what great occasion there would be for it.

CHAPTER XIV

MAHOMET'S COFFIN

KEN went back to Woodlands, because it lay in his line of route and because he had to fetch something from the archdeaconry. He came upon Mrs. Hobhouse, who enveloped him, eager for information.

"Well, have you seen him?"

"I have," said Ken.

"And have you given him your notice?"

"Well, I haven't."

"Why not?"

"He was so busy and preoccupied that I could hardly get a word in with him."

"You should have forced the opportunity. You're like your father. You never do the right thing."

"You might include yourself too, for once in a way."

"What do you mean?" the lady asked, bridling.

"How many people have you told about your discovery at the flat?"

"Not many. Just one or two of my most intimate friends. And those only in strictest confidence. I didn't think it right to prejudge the matter."

"So that by now it's all over the place. Well, mater, you'll have to untell it. I'm sorry to say you'll look very foolish."

"Why should I look foolish?"

"Because the reason Sir Clement took Hazel up to London was to marry her."



Mrs. Hobhouse uttered a piercing scream which was echoed by Josephine who had just entered.

"The designing little minx!" said Josephine viciously, being the first to recover her breath.

"If Sir Clement is so silly as to throw himself away on a piece of baggage like that," said Mrs. Hobhouse loftily, "I suppose all we can do is to wash our hands of him."

"Excuse me, mater," said Ken with a threatening look, "I want you to know that the piece of baggage happens to be a friend of mine."

"Why, what have I said?" fluttered Mrs. Hobhouse in great alarm. She had a wholesome fear of Ken in his violent moods.

"That's it. Half the time you don't know what you do say," Ken flung at her and stalked out.

"There you are—that's the end of all your fine hopes," said Josephine mordantly. "You always manage things so beautifully."

"Pardon me, Josephine," said Mrs. Hobhouse with dignity, "I am not aware that the fault is mine. I prefer to think that the shortcoming lies with you. You evidently did not know how to get on the right side of Sir Clement."

"The man hasn't got a right side!"

"That Middleton girl seems to have found it. You have never learnt to make the most of yourself, Josephine."

"I have learnt all that you taught me," said her daughter flippantly. "Perhaps that was the mistake I made."

Mrs. Hobhouse was striding up and down in the most violent perturbation of spirit.

"To think that that feather-brained little chit is going to be Lady Barradine and that I shall have to pay court to her!"

"You can ignore her," said Josephine with a shrug.

"How can we possibly ignore Sir Clement? And I sup-

pose, being the bully he is—I have always suspected him of being a bully—he will have something to say to anybody who would attempt to give his wife the cold shoulder."

"You can move away from here."

"What, get your stepfather to change his residence when he won't even change the ridiculous and inaccurate name of his house? Oh, what an error of judgment in me to have married again!"

"I don't know that you've done so badly for yourself, mother. You've feathered your nest pretty well."

"I forgive you that undutiful remark, child. I am making allowances for your disappointment and bitterness of heart. Oh, it won't be so bad for you. You will live at Swinton or perhaps at Woodbridge, unless the ill-natured little hussy sets Sir Clement against you. What a providential dispensation that dear Ambrose is spending the day with us!" And Mrs. Hobhouse lifted pious eyes to heaven.

"Oh, pickle dear Ambrose!" cried Josephine irritably.

"Whether you do so in sugar or vinegar is entirely your own affair, dear Josephine. But I would humbly suggest that the dangling period should not be any longer protracted."

Dear Josephine evidently did not possess the courage of her prejudices, for presently she went in quest of dear Ambrose. She found him pacing up and down the garden with Mr. Hobhouse, deep in a conversation relating to the forthcoming Consistorial Conference. And in that moment Josephine quickly arranged her plans for her forthcoming domestic routine. Ambrose should have his conferences and she would have her bridge-parties. And heaven help dear Ambrose if he ever mixed up his conferences with her parties.

"Pater, dear," she said sweetly, "could you spare Mr. Fotheringham for a few minutes?"

"Oh, certainly, my dear. *Place aux dames,*" said Mr. Hobhouse with the fine old-world courtesy that was in him.

Josephine and the Rev. Ambrose strolled away and, as Josephine kept silent, he took the initiative.

"Is there any particular reason, my dear Josephine, for your giving me this exquisite pleasure?"

"Must there be a reason for everything I do?"

"Oh, not at all, not at all," he assured her hastily.

"Then you imply that I often do things without a reason."

"Oh, not at all, not at all," he assured her again, getting terribly confused.

"I merely called you away because you were tiring the dear old pater. We have to look after him. He is breaking up rapidly."

"Oh, really? I had no idea of it," he said penitently.

"Yes, I'm afraid you are rather lacking in *savoir faire,*" Josephine said severely. "I don't know whether you will ever acquire it. I'm just wondering whether I shouldn't look about for some one more gifted in that direction. . . ."

"Oh, Josephine, you couldn't be so cruel!"

"Or take you with your imperfections."

"Did I really hear . . ."

"There is also a certain monotony of expression I observe in you. You are constantly asking whether your ears didn't deceive you. You will have to get out of that."

"Josephine, I feel sure that in your hands I should become the most perfect being alive."

"I rather think you will," she said with emphasis. "Mother will help as well."

The Rev. Ambrose walked on at her side, feeling unhappy and chopfallen. He had expected tidings of good cheer and instead she had merely taken him off to lecture him. But even that was a good sign. Unless he was to be some-

thing to her in the long end, she would hardly take all this trouble with him. And even then he did not, in the innocence of his heart, know how near he was to the goal of his desire.

"Let's go and sit in the arbor," suggested Josephine.

"Yes, let us," he assented eagerly. "It will make me think I'm Pan with his most beautiful nymph."

"And now, dear Ambrose," she said when they had got there, "do you think you could say very quickly three times: 'Josephine, will you be my wife?' Three times, Amby, please, one after another."

"What is this, Josephine?" he asked, starting back.

"Your punishment. Don't you remember my telling you some days ago that you would have to propose to me three more times? You suggested doing it all at once, but I didn't care about it. I've changed my mind since."

"No, I can't do that, Josephine," he said stiffly.

"What do you mean, Ambrose?" she asked, not without alarm.

"Not quickly three times one after another. Not like a schoolboy gabbling off his lessons. No, Josephine, this, the most solemn occasion of my life, must be treated in the dignified and decorous way it deserves."

"Well, do you want to do it between meals, like taking a medicine? Ambrose, do you look on it in the light of taking a medicine?"

"Yes, Josephine, the Elixir of Life."

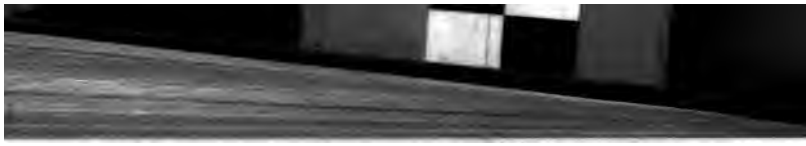
She made a gesture of impatience.

"Well, then, have it your own way."

He walked a little distance out of the arbor and then came back slowly.

"Josephine, may I have the honor of asking you to be my wife?"

"That's once, Amby. Now twice more."



Again he walked out with solemn step, returning as solemnly.

"Josephine, will you make me the happiest man alive by marrying me?"

"That's twice," said Josephine, cramming her handkerchief into her mouth.

He was about to walk out again, when she caught him by the arm and held him back.

"Amby, for goodness' sake, don't do it again, or I shall positively shriek. Have you any idea how ridiculous you're making yourself? Of course I'll marry you, if only for being the quaintest thing alive."

That was hardly the reason the Rev. Ambrose would have chosen had he had the choice, but he had to make the best of it. With coldly ecstatic lips he kissed her forehead which was all she offered him.

"You had better let me choose the engagement ring. You are sure to be swindled," she said briskly. "And while we're about it we may as well select the furniture."

"But, Josephine, dear, I have a beautifully appointed house."

"We'll have to have a house twice as big and you're not going to smuggle any of your old lumber into it. Horsehair and antimacassars! I'm not going to live in a second-hand hovel, dear Ambrose, not even to please you."

"That old lumber, as it pains me to hear you call it, is very dear to me. It's been in our family for over a hundred years."

"Then it's time it was scrapped. If you want to keep it, stow it in the garrets and whenever you feel inclined you can go and sit among your ghosts and heirlooms."

"Josephine!" he protested, chilled by her prosaic manner.

"What's the matter, Ambrose, are you sulking?" she asked with lifted eyebrows.

"Not in the least. My heart is full of a rich contentment."

"Then let's go and tell mother that you have ceased to be like Mahomet's coffin."

"What a strange expression, Josephine!"

But at that moment they met Ken, who was thus the first recipient of the news that the Rev. Ambrose was no longer hanging between heaven and earth. To which he was nearer was perhaps a matter of uncertainty even to himself. At any rate, this is what he said:

"Ken—I suppose I may call you so now?—congratulate me. I'm the happiest man under the sun."

"Not only the happiest, but the luckiest, Ambrose," said Ken with a grimace. "Wish you joy, Josephine—taken the plunge at last? I suppose you won't forget to send felicitations to Sir Clement and Miss Middleton. Poor devil!" he added to himself, with a chuckle at Ambrose, as he walked away.



CHAPTER XV

RUN TO EARTH

But soon he became sober enough. He had been successful in his visit to the lumber-room, as he assured himself, tapping his hip-pocket. It was rather a rusty affair he carried there, by no means as shiny and beautiful as the nickel-plated thing he had thrown into the lake. But that had been for himself, and this was merely for somebody else.

He went back to the Priory, where he supplied himself with one or two other articles he might find useful. Then he waited for the dusk. The evening hour seemed to him more propitious for the object in hand.

And now he was in the train, on the road to test his preposterous idea. Hope and misgiving swayed him alternately, the one based on what almost amounted to an intuition, the other on the uncertainty attendant on all things human. The main thing to go upon, the one that had originally suggested to him his doubts, was the fact that there was no grave. Will Dallas was not where he should be, or, at any rate, where he was said to be. Neither buried on the karoo nor in the gully. And being dead at the moment that Clement had left him, he could not have walked away. And it was not the kind of luggage with which his brother and the latter's companions would have saddled themselves to take away to any distance. So either he was dead and buried, or he was not. Charley, of course, was positive that he was. That was what he was drawing his money for. Unless Will was dead there would be no money. It was

therefore to his interest that Will should be dead. It was all rather a little mixed up, but Ken saw his point very clearly.

One thing that had struck him was Charley's evident reluctance to state his address. No law-abiding citizen should be reluctant to do that. His business with Sir Clement was perfectly legitimate as long as Sir Clement chose to regard it so. Charley's motive, therefore, could only have been that he did not desire visitors, that, in fact, for reasons of his own he was afraid of them. Ken had whittled down all those possible reasons to a particular one, and a very peculiar one at that. So peculiar that Ken wondered why he had not investigated it before. But, of course, he had only recently come back from Africa.

Well, if his idea missed fire, all the luckier for Charley. But Ken was determined that the white light of scrutiny should play full on Charley's secretiveness. And if the first time failed to discover anything, it would be followed by other attempts. And if from all these attempts he came back empty-handed, then Clem must be left to go to his fate.

It was only an hour's journey to Coventry. Arrived there, Ken found St. Andrew's Street without any difficulty. It was a longish, irregularly built thoroughfare on the outskirts of the town, and Number 23, as Ken ascertained by walking past it casually, was somewhat different from its neighbors, inasmuch as it jutted out in a bold and ostentatious manner from the rest, as though it had nothing to conceal.

There were few passers-by, and Ken took up a coign of observation on the opposite side of the road. The house was in two stories, the lower part of it in total darkness, but in the upper story a dim light showed through a dark blind.



"Waitin' for anybody, sir?" asked a friendly policeman, sauntering past.

"I was just wondering whether I should give a friend of mine at Number 23 opposite a look-up," he replied.

"Friend of yours? Well, that's more than most of us can say," remarked the constable affably. "I saw him in at the 'Dolphin' when I passed there five minutes ago. I don't suppose he'll be long. Gone for ammunition, and, I heard say, he do get through a hell of a lot o' stuff if he drinks all that he fetches away."

"Perhaps as much as two men," Ken observed quickly.

"Well, two men might manage it at a squeeze. But I ain't got nothin' ag'inst him. Never goes out much, never says much to nobody. Very quiet, never gives no trouble and pays his way. Comes from furrin parts, I should say."

"Who's in the house with him?"

"In the house with him?" echoed the constable, apparently surprised at the question. "Nobody, so far as anybody knows. Nobody's ever set foot in it, bar himself, since he come. Well, good night, sir. This is my last round, thank goodness."

Ken remained behind, his eyes glued on the house opposite. Charley was not economical, or he would not leave a light burning while he was out. And then, suddenly, Ken's heart leapt into his mouth. Against the blind upstairs there had appeared, fugitively, the silhouette of a man, vanishing as quickly as it had shown. So there was some one in the house besides Charley. Ken felt himself thrill strangely. There was little of religion in him, but somehow the notion came to him that the skiographer who had painted that shadow on the blind was nobody less than God himself.

Very soon after Charley came along in the light of the street-lamp he was seen to carry two bottles while

another one stuck out of each of his two coat pockets. He looked round cautiously as he inserted the key in the door. In a moment Ken had crossed over.

"Evening, Mr. Dallas," he said civilly.

Charley recognized him and gave a start.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Boghouse. What the devil are you doing here?" He was not so much in the wind as last time, but he was still a good quarter seas over and spoke thickly.

"Sent by Sir Clement. Very important. Might mean a cool ten thousand for you," Ken jerked out hurriedly.

"All right. I'll be over to Woodlands to-morrow. Good night."

"To-morrow will be too late. It's got to be settled at once. Won't take us more than five minutes, Mr. Dallas."

Charley seemed meditating further objections, when Ken made short work of them by shouldering past him and stepping into the dark passage. Charley followed him in and emitted a low peculiar whistle.

"What's that for, Mr. Dallas?"

"I always do that when I come in. Mice. Give 'em notice."

"I'm sure they're very much obliged to you," laughed Ken, good-humoredly. He struck a match. "Which way, Dallas?"

"In here," said Charley surlily, throwing open the door of the front room. "There's the gas. Darned cheek of you to force yourself into a man's house without with or by his leave. Now what's the business, and be quick about it."

"Sir Clement is worried about your brother's burial place," said Ken, plunging at once into *medias res*. "He wants to give him a massive tombstone. He's afraid the jackals will get at him. Trouble is we can't find the spot. I've been out there to look for it."

"The devil you have!" exclaimed Charley with a start.



"No sign of it anywhere. Sir Clement wants you to go out with me again and show it. He'll give you ten thousand pounds for your trouble."

Charley's muddled brain whirled and then worked rapidly. It should not be difficult to obtain a substitute corpse, to salt a grave with it and pocket ten thousand. . . . The man was clearly mad to chuck his money about like that.

"Well, I'll consider it, Mr. Doghouse."

"Yes, and look here, Dallas . . ."

And Dallas found himself looking down the barrel of a revolver.

"If you make a sound," sibilated Ken, "you're a dead man as sure as I'm a living one."

The sudden change of front utterly demoralized Charley and he huddled back in his chair, raising mutely protesting hands. Ken slipped round to his side, rudely jerked up his chin and thrust a gag into his mouth. Then he lifted him and laid him flat on the floor—Charley was as a babe in his hands—knelt on his chest and bound him strongly by arms and legs with the coil of fine stout rope he had brought along. Overhead he heard a stealthy footfall and the sound as of a door being cautiously opened ajar. All the time he had been performing his operation on Charley he had kept on talking, matter quite irrelevant to anything, and only just loud enough for the listener upstairs to hear the sound of his voice without distinguishing the words. Then suddenly he said more loudly.

"All right, Mr. Dallas, then that's settled. I'll see you again to-morrow. Good night."

He walked out into the dark passage, opened the front door, slammed it and stole back into the room.

"Come down, Will," he called out, simulating Charley's voice with some success. "Coast clear."

Slippered feet were heard descending the stairs, and in a

moment or two the alleged defunct Will Dallas stood in the doorway, clothed in his corporeal body encased in pajamas.

"Hands up!" shouted Ken.

Will obeyed instantly and stood surveying the scene with an air of injured surprise.

"There's a trick to play on a fellow!" he said reproachfully. "It's Hobhouse, Kenneth of that name, isn't it?"

"Yes, charmed to see you looking so well, Will Dallas," said Ken grimly. "I heard you were dead."

"An exaggerated report. Well, dear boy, how much longer are you going to keep me in this ridiculous attitude? My arms ache. I assure you I have nothing in my pocket. I don't sleep with a revolver on me in this peaceful land. Charley too seems a bit uncomfortable, transmogrified into that nondescript bundle. He's got nothing, either, my word on it, old chap."

"Yes, your word is your bond. I prefer my own guarantees. You'll both stay as you are till I make other arrangements for you."

He turned to the window when Will stayed him.

"I say, Kenneth, what's the usual penalty for a corpse coming to life again?"

"It should be, in your case, to be made a corpse for good. But perhaps they'll let you off with ten years' hard."

"Ugh, I don't think I'll like that, after the soft life I've been leading of late," said Will ruefully. "Perhaps you'd like to hear what happened, Kenneth."

Ken saw that something was working at the back of Will's mind and that he was talking to gain time. Charley had rolled under the table where he was lost to view. Ken shrugged. He rather wanted to hear Will's story and he had the fellows set.

"Well, about that fight," began Will, "in which Derek, as we called him, thought he had killed me. It's true, I got a



nasty knock on the nob that made it sing like a nightingale, and the blood helped too. But I really wasn't hurt a bit. I just played 'possum. I had learnt the trick from a Voodoo witch doctor in the West Indies. You see, my idea was to frighten Derek into running away and leaving me the farm. Which was exactly what occurred. And then Charley and I, between us, we hatched out this easy money scheme. It worked out beautifully, as you know, not counting the hearty laughs we had up our sleeves. We really got quite a lot of fun out of it. Ah, now those charming days are over," he added regretfully, "but we've had a good run for it." He suddenly broke off and pointed to the window with a start. "Look, good heavens, what's that?"

Ken, caught, spun round to look and the movement probably saved his life. A shot rang out from under the table and he felt a stinging pain in his ear. As he discovered afterwards, the tip of the lobe had been shot away. He did not hesitate an instant. His revolver spoke and Charley answered with a howl of pain. Then Ken promptly shoved his elbow through the window and blew the police whistle he had held in his left hand all the time ready for emergencies. The shots, the splintering glass and the whistle created an immediate commotion in the street. There were the shouts of men and the screams of women. And a moment or two later a burly constable appeared at the window, pushed up the sash and scrambled in, followed by half a dozen men. Will coolly stepped up to the constable.

"Officer, arrest that man! I charge him with intimidation and attempted murder."

Several pairs of hands were immediately laid on Ken. He shook them off and stepped back.

"And I charge these men with conspiracy and blackmail. I'm Kenneth Hobhouse, of the Archdeaconry, Woodlands, and steward to Sir Clement Barradine."

"Yes, that's all right," said one of the men. "I know Mr. Hobhouse."

"And we none of us know these other fellows," said several voices.

Will uttered a laugh.

"Come out, Charley, if you're alive," he cried. "Show your hand—game's up."

Charley scrambled forth from under the table.

"Lucky for you I was only loaded in one chamber," he growled spitefully at Ken.

His injury proved to be merely a slight flesh-wound in the arm. Ken saw them safely to the police station and then got a trunk call through to Tudor Square. He felt great anxiety about Clem. His manner, as he had left him that morning, had not been very reassuring. To his immense relief Clem answered himself.

"What the deuce are you doing at Coventry, Ken?" he asked in surprise.

"I went to do a little job that came off all right. I have great news for you, Clem. Come down by the next train."

Sir Clement thought it a nuisance. Good, tinkering Ken, what mare's-nest had he discovered now? But he caught the newspaper train and found Ken awaiting him impatiently on the platform. Ken held out to him a flask.

"Have a swig at this, Clem."

Sir Clement waved it aside.

"Don't be afraid, Ken," he said with a grim laugh, "I can't hear worse than I know."

"But you may hear better and it may knock you off your pins. Clem, Will Dallas is alive."

He watched anxiously for the effect. To his astonishment he saw a vexed petulant look come over Clem's face and heard him say in high dudgeon:

"Good Lord, Ken, did you drag me down here to tell me this cock-and-bull yarn?"

Then Ken told him the cock-and-bull yarn at length, and Clement listened quietly, patiently. At last he said:

"I see I've infected you. You're beginning to suffer from hallucinations like me. You've dreamt this, or you're drunk."

Ken, staggered by such prodigious disbelief, wondered for a moment whether Clement was right. Then his hand made a move to his ear-lobe which, although attended to at the police surgery, still tingled angrily.

"Clem, I've not been dreaming, nor am I drunk."

"You've faked up somebody to personate him."

"By Jove, that never occurred to me, but it would have been a rattling good idea. Well, come to the station and see for yourself."

But at the station a drowsy inspector told them that regulations prohibited their admission to the cells before eight o'clock.

"I told you it wasn't Will," said Clement, turning away despairingly.

"No, it won't be, till eight o'clock."

"Ken, if you've hoaxed me, I'll slay you in cold blood."

"Yes, but there'll be nobody to personate *me*."

Sir Clement looked at his watch.

"I can't believe it—I can't believe it! Four more eternities to get through."

And during those four mortal hours he dragged poor Ken on a furious chase through the sleeping town while his fate hung in the balance.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLY-LEAF OF LIFE

HAZEL was walking sorrowfully amid the pyramids of piled-up boxes that were the memorial to her foiled youth. She wondered what she was to do with them all, she a bride wedded for all time to her own virginity, her bridegroom despair. She had been fighting her rebellious heart that cried out in its pain. Every now and again she thought she had prevailed and a comforting sense of resignation stole over her. And the next moment the fierce struggle began anew. She was getting worn out, she hoped it would kill her.

Late the evening before he had come to her, after his talk with Ken over the 'phone, and had said he was going away during the night. There was an ill-omened ring about his words. He had stolen away in the darkness and the darkness covered many mysteries. It came to her that this furtive going away meant that he would never return. Well, perhaps it was better so. So she would be spared the last, the most agonizing wrench of all at her heart-strings.

She thought of her plans. She would never set foot again in Woodlands. She would write to Tabitha to send, or perhaps bring up, the remainder of her belongings. At that moment, enter Mrs. Pink.

"If you please, Miss, a lady to see you."

"I won't see anybody. What's her name?"

"Now did you ever see such a thing?" said Mrs. Pink, rubbing her forehead. "My memory's clean gone. I think it had something to do with a knife and fork. A short, stout . . ."



Hazel did not wait to hear more but sprang up and rushed out with the glad cry: "Tabitha!"

And the next instant they were locked in each other's embrace.

"Oh, you dear, good angel, what ever has brought you?" asked Hazel, between tears and laughter.

"Sir Clement's letter, my dear. I got it this morning. He said he would like to have me with you."

"Did he say anything else?"

"Yes, that you are not marrying Jocelyn, that he is going away for good, and that you and he are parting on the best of terms."

"Yes, Tab, the best of terms," said Hazel, wiping her eyes. "Oh, I don't think there ever have been such good friends in the world as we are. Regular David and Jonathan—there's no female equivalent for that, is there, Tab? Which shows what nasty spiteful things we women are. Well, since you know all, I'm glad I needn't tell you. I've been saying it over to myself so many times—I should like to forget it for a little while."

"No, we won't talk about it, dearie," said Tabitha softly, well knowing that Hazel wanted to talk about nothing else. "But how strangely things have come about. Who ever thought it would end up like this?"

"Who did?" echoed Hazel, with a far-away look. "How should I ever have dreamt that he loved me all the time? Not that it would have made any difference, seeing that he had his purpose to work out," she said brokenly. Then she went on:

"So he asked you to come and see me. Oh, he is th kindest, the most thoughtful man that ever breathed!"

"I think we have agreed on that, child. Now, Haze dear, tell me what you are going to do."

"He has provided for me," said Hazel simply. "I sh

go down to the places where Salome lived and do whatever little good I can."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Tabitha. "I was worrying dreadfully about you. Mrs. Hobhouse has been shouting her abominable story from the housetops and I figured out all the consequences. You have nothing to fear now."

"No, only myself, Tab."

"You're a fool," said Miss Witherspoon whose name Mrs. Pink had found it so hard to remember. "If you drape your daylight in shadows, you mustn't complain that you have to go groping and knock yourself against rough corners. Get out into the open, Hazel. Drench yourself in sunshine, and then plunge into your work till the waves close over your head and you have to come up fighting for breath. There may be some mixed metaphors in that, but you'll find that life is sweet after all."

"Yes, I'll do that, Tab," said Hazel, and her voice sounded so tired that Tabitha bled inwardly.

"And I'll stand by you, Hazel," she said stoutly. "Whenever you need rest and comfort you will know where to find them. And I'm a terribly restful and comforting person, I warn you, Hazel."

"Oh, there's no doubt that I shall need it all, Tab. God seems to have become angry with me again, because I have lost the gift of tears."

"That is to show how brave you can be. Only be brave, sweetheart, be brave."

"He also asked me to be brave."

"No, I'm sure he wouldn't like to think of you as giving way. The greatness of his purpose—I can only guess at it —should make you great as well. In the magnitude of our sufferings we find our true selves, Hazel."

"Oh, you're doing me such a lot of good already, Tab!"

"It's nothing to what I shall do. That's what he wanted



me to be with you for. I'm not going to talk about poor little me, but I know what's in this stunted body of mine. My life has been an absurdly pedestrian one—I've never had to cope with great occasions. But I've always wanted a chance of testing my strength. You're my great occasion, Hazel, and I shall do my best to rise to the height of it."

"Thank you, dear. I accept you gratefully. I shall take from you all that you can give. I shall not scruple to drain your resources dry. Tab, Tab, dear, I have no one but you!"

"And you won't need anybody else. Come, dear, shall we go out a little? I am longing to see Hyde Park."

"Oh, Tab," cried Hazel self-reproachfully, "you've come such a long journey and I haven't even offered you a cup of tea."

"Don't worry. I took my breakfast into the train with me, thermos flask and all, and enjoyed it. Now just go and get ready."

Hazel had risen to her feet and then all at once she stiffened. She had heard the outer door open and shut and quick eager steps coming along the corridor. So he had not gone away after all. And his step sounded so different. There was a spring in it, a buoyancy, like that of a victor coming into the kingdom he has conquered. And then the steps ceased and he stood reviewing for a few moments the wonderful thing that had happened.

They had been at the station at eight o'clock and were shown into the cell. And there he had seen Will Dallas. Oh, yes, it was Will Dallas, though every man who had died since the beginning of time came and testified to the contrary. Charley was there as well. He wore his left arm in a sling and looked up and scowled as they entered. But Will's face wore a look of jaunty cheerfulness.

"Hullo, Derek!" he said.

Sir Clement looked hard at the two. Then he turned away and shook his head.

"I don't know these men," he said to the Inspector who had accompanied them. "Mr. Hobhouse has made an absurd mistake. You have heard one of them address me by another name. I can make no charge."

"You've made me look a pretty fool," grumbled Ken, as they walked out of the station. "But I can't blame you, being a man of the caliber you are. Personally I should have let them have their deserts. But I quite understand your state of mind. I suppose the next thing you'll do is to send the scoundrel a fat check and a letter of thanks for being good enough to be alive."

"Come, Ken, let's catch the train to heaven," he had replied.

And here he stood in his heaven, and in his face was an effulgence, a triumphant flush that made it look as if all the withering years had fallen away from him.

"Hazel, Hazel, dearest!" he cried, enfolding her, as though he were the storm-wind personified.

Poor Miss Witherspoon, utterly ignored and feeling herself ridiculously superfluous, made an inconspicuous exit.

"Clement, Clement, what has happened?" asked Hazel, her heart fluttering with a joyous fear.

"Oh, the best, the very best!" he answered her with a shout of gladness.

And then, when he had told her, she went down on her knees and gently drew him down with her.

So they knelt for a little while. No, God was not angry with her. He had not taken from her the gift of tears.

And he? "Balm in Gilead—balm in Gilead," was all his lips murmured. But the words rang in his heart like a peal of bells and echoed to heaven in a pæan of prayer and praise.



And presently they went to find Tabitha and, to her dismay and delight, Sir Clement took her in a great bear's hug.

"You must be bridesmaid, Tab, you really must!" cried Hazel, clapping her hands.

Miss Witherspoon looked very indignant.

"I shall do no such thing. I refuse to make myself look absurd, even if you have to remain an old maid over it a hundred times."

"Do you know, Clem, dearest, where we have to go first?" Hazel asked him when they were alone again.

"Yes, darling," he replied with ready understanding.

So they drove to the cemetery, and Hazel went from one grave to another.

"I have told them," she said, coming back to him, for he had stood away, letting her go on her loving errand alone. "I have told them of my happiness and they answered that they were at peace."

Then she nestled close to him with a little shudder.

"Oh, Clem, Clem, what a dark and dreary time it has been, full of dismalness and death."

"Yes, my own," he said solemnly. "And now we shall open the Book of Life and write our names on the fly-leaf in letters of gold."

"Yours first, Clem, yours first!"

THE END.









